



Lost child policy

February 2024

Elsworth Pre-School takes the safety of children very seriously and will take every precaution necessary to ensure that the children in their care do not leave a session unaccompanied. The chances of finding a missing child safe are greatest if the child's absence is soon discovered. Staff will undertake periodic head counts using the key person system, in addition to the registration procedure. If, in the event of a member of staff not being able to account for a child's whereabouts, the following action will be taken:

Procedure for a child going missing or leaving unaccompanied from the pre-school premises.

We will:

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the staff member will alert the most senior member of staff available, who must establish who last saw the missing child, where and when.
- Staff members are all briefed and any other adults on premises are made aware of the situation.
- The remaining children will be gathered into one group, within the pre-school building, with one/two adults, one who must be a staff member, so they remain supervised, calm, and supported throughout.
- A staff member will check the doors and pre-school gates to establish if a breach of security could have occurred. If a breach has occurred, the grounds should be secured immediately. The most senior member of staff should assign an adult to start a search of the surrounding area outside of the pre-school premises.
- A register will be taken to make sure that no other children have gone missing, and the children will be asked if/when they saw the child that is missing.
- The remaining staff members will search the pre-school premises systematically, under the guidance of the most senior member of staff.

In the unlikely event that the child is not found within 5 minutes of being identified as missing, the Designed Officer will call the police and follow police instructions.

They will then contact the parents of the missing child. If they are unavailable, they will call the child's emergency contact number.

Procedure for a child going missing on an outing.

We will:

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the staff members on the outing ask children to stand with their designated carer and carry out a headcount to ensure that no other child has gone astray.



- The organiser will be informed immediately, and all staff/volunteers present will be informed. Some staff will be deployed to start an immediate thorough search of the area, ensuring that all other children remain supervised, calm, and supported throughout.
- The most senior member of staff will contact the police and report the child as missing. They must follow the police's instructions.
- They will then contact the child's parent/carer, giving details of what has happened. If the whole pre-school is on an outing, all contact details will be taken on the trip by the most senior member of staff, otherwise the pre-school will be informed and the most senior member of staff at pre-school will inform the child's parent/carer. If they are unavailable, they will call the child's emergency contact number.
- During this period, staff will be continually searching for the missing child, whilst other staff maintain the safety and welfare of the remaining children.
- It will be the most senior member of staff's responsibility to ensure that there are adequate staff to care for the children and get them back safe, a member of staff to meet the police and someone to continue the search (this may mean contacting relief staff).

Recording the incident

All incidents must be recorded in writing as soon as practicably possible to include the following:

- The date and time of the incident
- Where the child went missing from e.g. the setting or an outing venue
- Who (staff/children) were on 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, including the time it is estimated that the child went missing.
- What had taken place on premises or on the outing from the point the child went missing
- The time that the police, Local Authority Designated Officer and/or Ofsted (if relevant) were notified.
- The report is counter-signed by the most senior member of staff and the date and time added.
- What is believed to have caused the breach in security.

Post-incident risk assessments will be conducted following any incident of this nature to enable the chance of this reoccurring being reduced.

Carrying out an investigation

The Chair of Trustees may be required to carry out a full investigation which may include taking written statements from staff, volunteers and/or parent/carers who were present. LADO, Ofsted, the pre-school staff and parents/carers of the lost child will be informed of the outcome of the investigation.



If the incident warrants a police investigation, all staff, volunteers and parents/carers are expected 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.

Managing people

The pre-school understands in such circumstances emotions can be heightened 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.

Our staff may 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. Our manager and trustees will ensure that any staff under investigation are not only fairly treated but receive support while feeling vulnerable.

Parents may feel angry, and fraught. They may blame our staff and may single out one staff member over others; they may direct their anger at our manager. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff, one who should be the Pre-School Manager and the other the Chair of Trustees. Aggression or threats against our staff are not tolerated and the police may 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.

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. Chair of Trustees will use their discretion to decide what action to take.

With incidents of this nature parents, carers, children and staff may require support and reassurance following the traumatic experience. Management will provide this or seek further support where necessary.

Dealing with the media

Distressed parents may contact the local press, or reporters may hear about the incident if the police are involved. It is sensible for one person, which will be the Pre-School Manager to be the one who speaks for the setting. All adults will be asked to refer all enquiries to the agreed spokesperson. Our staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press.



Informing other parents

We recognise that other parents/carers will need to be given brief, accurate information as rapidly as possible. We will ensure that this happens by sending an email about the incident and offering a meeting if parents would like to speak about the incident further.

Adopted on:	15 th February 2024
Adopted by:	Sophie Mills, Pre-School Manager Hannah Holland, Chair of Trustees
Next Review Date:	15 th February 2025