



Lost or Missing Child Policy

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Effective Date: 23.03.2026

Review Date: Annually or following significant change/incident

Prevention

The prevention of a lost or missing child is a key priority at Forest & Play. We operate robust procedures to minimise risk and ensure all children remain safely supervised throughout the session.

Staff will:

- Conduct a secure meet-and-greet procedure at the start and end of each session, ensuring children are handed directly to and from an authorised adult.
- Maintain accurate daily registers, recording children's arrival and departure times.
- Ensure the site entrance gate is securely closed and locked once all children have arrived and remains secured throughout the session.
- Carry out regular visual checks of all access points, boundaries, and fencing.
- Use clearly defined boundary systems, including red boundary ropes, markers, and natural landmarks, to identify the areas children may access.
- Introduce and regularly reinforce boundary expectations with children through daily safety briefings and reminders.
- Ensure all children understand the meaning of the red boundary ropes and know they must not cross them without direct adult supervision.
- Complete thorough site checks before each session to identify any hazards, damage to boundaries, or potential escape routes.
- Position staff strategically across the woodland area to maintain effective supervision and sightlines.
- Ensure all children remain within sight or sound of a practitioner at all times.
- Carry out headcounts:
 - On arrival
 - Before moving between areas
 - At regular intervals throughout the session



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- Following any group activity
 - Before leaving the site
 - On return to the meeting point
- Use walkie-talkies to maintain communication between staff when working across different areas of the site.
- Follow EYFS ratios at all times and deploy staff effectively according to the needs of the children and the environment.
- Ensure children understand what to do if they become separated from the group, including remaining where they are and responding to the agreed emergency call signal (howler station).
- Regularly practise emergency procedures so children become familiar with how to respond if an incident occurs.

The woodland area is risk assessed daily, and boundaries are reviewed continuously throughout sessions. Any area considered unsafe will be immediately restricted from use until the risk has been removed or appropriately managed.

If a Child Goes Missing

In the unlikely event that a child cannot be accounted for, all staff must act immediately, calmly, and in a coordinated manner.

1. Immediate Response

The practitioner identifying that a child is missing will immediately alert all staff using the agreed emergency signal (Howler Station & Walkie Talkies).

Upon hearing the alert:

- All activities will stop immediately.
- Staff will conduct an immediate headcount of all children.
- The Forest School Leader (or most senior person on site) will assume control of the incident.
- Staff will establish the child's last known location, activity, and time seen.
- A description of the child, including clothing and footwear, will be confirmed.

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2. Securing Remaining Children

The safety and wellbeing of the remaining children remains a priority.

- One or more designated practitioners will gather all children and escort them to the agreed safe meeting point (Cabin).
- Children will be reassured and kept calm through storytelling, songs, quiet activities, or age-appropriate discussions.
- Children will not be informed that a child is missing unless necessary.
- Staff will continue to monitor and support children's emotional wellbeing throughout the incident.
- A full register and headcount will be completed at the meeting point.

3. Immediate Search (0–5 Minutes)

The Forest School Leader will coordinate a rapid search of the site.

Staff will:

- Search the child's last known location.
- Check all designated learning areas.
- Search dens, shelters, long grass, wooded areas, toilets, storage areas, and any other places a child may hide or become distracted.
- Check all boundary lines, fencing, gates, and access points.
- Follow all red boundary rope routes and exclusion areas.
- Use walkie-talkies to maintain communication throughout the search.

The site's secure perimeter fencing and controlled access point will be checked immediately to determine whether the child remains within the site boundary.

4. Escalation (Within 10 Minutes)

If the child is not located immediately:

- Police will be contacted via 999 without delay.



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- Parents/carers will be informed.
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead will be notified.
- Staff will provide emergency services with:
 - Child's full name and age
 - Physical description
 - Clothing and footwear description
 - Medical information if relevant
 - Last known location
 - Time last seen
 - Actions already taken

5. Ongoing Management

While emergency services are en route:

- Children will remain safely supervised in the Cabin.
- Practitioners will continue providing reassurance and maintaining normal routines wherever possible.
- Staff directed by the Forest School Leader may continue searching areas surrounding the site if safe to do so and only if adequate supervision remains for the other children.
- The Forest School Leader will liaise directly with police, parents/carers, and emergency services.

6. If the Child Is Found

When the child is located:

- Their physical safety and emotional wellbeing will be assessed immediately.
- Appropriate first aid will be administered if required.
- Parents/carers and police (if contacted) will be informed immediately.
- Staff will establish, where appropriate, how the incident occurred to prevent recurrence.



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- The child will be reassured and supported throughout.

7. Recording and Reporting

A full written record of the incident will be completed as soon as reasonably practicable and will include:

- Child's details
- Time identified as missing
- Timeline of events
- Searches undertaken
- Staff involved
- Agencies contacted
- Outcome of the incident
- Actions taken following the event

Ofsted and other relevant agencies will be notified where required under EYFS and safeguarding requirements.

8. Post-Incident Review

Following any lost or missing child incident:

- A full review of the incident will be undertaken.
- Relevant risk assessments will be reviewed and updated.
- Site security, fencing, gates, supervision arrangements, and boundary controls will be evaluated.
- Staff will participate in a debrief.
- Additional training or procedural changes will be implemented where necessary.
- Appropriate support will be offered to children, families, and staff affected by the incident.

9. Media Enquiries

Staff must not discuss the incident with the media or on social media.

Any enquiries must be referred directly to the Director or Nominated Individual.