

Children Missing from Early Learning and Childcare Settings

Information and Guidance

Introduction

Children may suddenly stop attending a childcare setting for a number of reasons, however, when a child does not arrive for their usual session and there has been no contact from the parent or carer, under your safeguarding responsibilities you have a duty to take the necessary steps to ensure that the child concerned is safe and well. It is recognised that the vast majority of families will inform their childcare provider if their child is going to be absent from the setting due to illness or holiday, or if they are planning to move or end their child's time at the setting.

All children who are deemed to be missing are vulnerable and this can be a sign of other issues in the child's life, as recognised in recent local and National Serious Case Reviews (SCR).

In the first instance, providers must take action to try and contact the family to ascertain the child's whereabouts. The action taken needs to be child-specific, recognising that providers generally know their children and families very well.

This guidance considers the process to follow for vulnerable children and also children for whom there have been no previous concerns. The guidance is designed to complement the procedures that settings already have in place. The process can also be used for a child who has enrolled at the setting but fails to turn up on their first planned day.

Vulnerable Children

A vulnerable child is:

- A child subject to a child protection plan
- A child in need
- A looked after child
- A child with a Single Assessment or an Education and Health care plan (EHC).

- A child who you have concerns about.

If the child concerned is considered a vulnerable child as defined above, or you have concerns about the child's wellbeing, the designated safeguarding lead (or a named deputy in their absence) should be informed immediately.

The designated safeguarding lead/key person should attempt to contact the parent/carer to establish why the child has not arrived for their session. If contact is made and a valid reason for the absence is provided, the information should be recorded. Any relevant professionals involved with the family should be informed e.g. social worker, family support worker.

If contact is made and the designated safeguarding lead/key person is concerned that the child may be at risk, the relevant professionals must be contacted immediately to discuss the concerns. The events, conversation and follow up actions must be recorded. If contact cannot be made the designated safeguarding lead should contact the relevant professionals and inform them. If there is no social care involvement with the family then you should contact **Kirklees Duty and Advice Service** on **01484 414960** and share your concerns; this may result in a referral being made.

Child with No Known Concerns

The child's key person (or secondary key person in their absence), should contact the parent/carer to establish the reason for the child's absence, using phone numbers provided. Text messages and email could also be used if there is no response to the call.

If contact is made and a satisfactory explanation is received, identify when the child will be returning to the setting and make a written record of the conversation. If contact is made and there are concerns about the child's wellbeing then you must contact Kirklees Duty and Advice.

If contact is not made, try to contact the parent/carer throughout the day on the numbers/emails provided. If there is no response, try contacting all emergency contact numbers.

If the child attends another setting, contact them to see if the child is attending or if they have had contact with the parent/carer. If appropriate, speak to other parents/carers attending your setting who might know the family (without breaching confidentiality) to try to find out if they have seen or heard from the parents/child.

If the child has any siblings, contact any settings/schools they attend to see if they have been attending, or if they have had contact with the family. Continue trying to contact the parent/carer and emergency contacts. If there is no success you could also contact the children's centre local to the family and the child's health visitor.

If the family are not able to be traced through your checks and the family are not engaging or responding to requests to contact the setting, contact the **Kirklees Children Missing in Education (CME) Team on 01484 221919** and provide them with the details of the child and family. You can contact your Early Years Community Consultant for advice if required.

What the Kirklees Children Missing in Education Team will do next

The statutory responsibility of this team only relates to children of compulsory school age; however, the team encourages referrals from those who are not yet compulsory school age so as to prevent loss of learning experiences and support the smooth transition into school in the future.

Once information is received by the team, this is input into a database and full checks are completed. Examples of these include:

- Known on Liquid Logic (Children's Services);
- Council tax records to determine address;
- Local health services and if necessary flags put on children to alert us if they join a GP in another part of the country;
- Known to Stronger Families;
- Benefits investigation team contacted if appropriate;
- Schools where siblings or other family members attend.

If the child is located outside of Kirklees, the CME team in that authority is contacted in order to carry out their own local checks. If the child is located within Kirklees, the CME team look at what holistic support the family need as well as education, hopefully leading to a smooth transition into other provision.

If the CME team identify a vulnerable child to be at risk of any harm, regardless of whether they have left the authority or not, because contacts have been built up over time the team are able to liaise with those contacts, share information and work in partnership.

On the rare occasion that the team are unable to locate families, a report is generated. Each half term, this information is checked against databases to find out if they have returned to Kirklees.

Free Early Education and Care (FEEC) Funding

If the child concerned is in receipt of funding, please also refer to the attendance monitoring section in the Provider Guide - *“Delivery of Free Early Education and Care for two, three and four year olds – A guide for Private, Voluntary and Independent Providers”*.