Missing Child Policy and Procedure

Jubilee Childcare Centre is committed to ensuring that every child remains safe, supervised and accounted for at all times. A missing child is treated as an immediate safeguarding emergency. The setting will act without delay to locate the child, protect all other children, involve the police where required, inform parents/carers and complete the necessary safeguarding, regulatory and internal follow-up.

Setting: Jubilee Childcare Centre

Applies to: All children aged 2–4, staff, agency staff, students and volunteers

Policy owner: Nursery Manager / Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

Effective from: September 2026

Review cycle: At least annually, and immediately after any relevant incident or statutory change

Related policies: Safeguarding & Child Protection; Attendance; Outings; Collection; Risk Assessment; Whistleblowing; Incident Reporting

1. Purpose and statutory basis

This policy adapts the key emergency-response structure in the source policy provided, but updates it for Jubilee Childcare Centre and for the current safeguarding requirements in force in England from September 2026.

This policy has regard to:

· Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework for group and school-based providers, effective 1 September 2026.

· Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.

· Department for Education safeguarding guidance for early years providers, including the 2026 requirements on child absences, supervision, safety of premises and safety on outings.

· Ofsted requirements for notifying significant events, where applicable, as soon as reasonably possible and no later than 14 days after the event.

· Kent local safeguarding arrangements and referral routes.

Key EYFS expectations Children must not leave the premises unsupervised. Children must usually be within sight and hearing of staff and always within sight or hearing. Providers must keep children safe on outings. Providers must also follow up unexplained or prolonged absences promptly and use safeguarding procedures where concerns arise.

2. Definitions

Missing child while in our care: A child who should be under Jubilee Childcare Centre's supervision but whose whereabouts cannot immediately be confirmed, whether on the premises, outdoors, during transition, or on an outing.

Unexplained absence: A child expected to attend who does not arrive and whose parent/carer has not notified the setting.

Prolonged absence: An absence that, taking account of the child's circumstances, vulnerability, family context, patterns and trends, causes concern and requires escalation under the attendance and safeguarding procedures.

Safeguarding emergency: Any situation where a child's immediate location or safety is unknown, or there is reason to believe the child may be at risk of significant harm.

3. Prevention and daily safeguarding controls

· Accurate registration on arrival and departure, with all transitions recorded and checked.

· Regular headcounts and name-to-face checks, especially before and after outdoor play, room changes, toileting routines, mealtimes, sleep/rest, trips and collection periods.

· Staff deployment that maintains effective supervision and the EYFS sight/hearing requirements.

· Doors, gates and access points secured appropriately, with staff following the setting's opening, closing, collection and visitor procedures.

· Children released only to adults explicitly authorised by the parent/carer.

· Up-to-date parent/carer and emergency contact details, with more than two emergency contacts held where possible.

· Outing risk assessments, named staff responsibility, frequent headcounts and at least one current paediatric first aider accompanying outings.

· Immediate challenge and reporting of any security, supervision or staffing concern.

No blame during the emergency The first priority is to find the child and keep all children safe. Staff must act calmly, communicate clearly and avoid speculation or assigning blame while the emergency response is under way.

4. Procedure: child missing from the nursery or outdoor area

1. Raise the alert immediately Any member of staff who cannot account for a child must alert the Nursery Manager/most senior practitioner immediately. State the child's name, where and when they were last seen, what they are wearing and any known risks or vulnerabilities.

2. Secure and account for everyone else Stop non-essential movement. One nominated practitioner takes the register and completes an immediate name-to-face check of all remaining children. Maintain required ratios and supervision; do not leave the group inadequately supervised to search.

3. Search systematically and quickly The manager allocates staff to search pre-agreed zones: all rooms, toilets, cupboards/quiet spaces, outdoor areas, exits, immediate perimeter and any location the child may reasonably have accessed. Check doors/gates/CCTV if available. Do not allow unvetted adults to join the search.

4. Call the police without delay For a child aged 2–4 whose whereabouts are unknown after the immediate check/search, or sooner if there is any indication the child has left the site or is in danger, call 999. Give the exact location, child description, last-known location/time, clothing, vulnerabilities and likely direction of travel. Follow police instructions.

5. Inform parents/carers The manager or delegated senior practitioner informs the parent/carer as soon as this can be done without delaying the emergency response. If they cannot be reached, use the child's alternative emergency contacts. Keep communication factual and calm.

6. Escalate safeguarding concerns If the circumstances raise concerns about abuse, neglect, exploitation, family circumstances, staff conduct, or a wider safeguarding risk, the DSL must follow the setting's safeguarding procedure and contact Kent Children's Social Care and/or request a police welfare response as appropriate.

7. Record and preserve information Record times, actions, staff deployment, searches, phone calls, police reference number, witness accounts and relevant door/gate/CCTV information. Preserve evidence and do not alter records.

8. When the child is found Ensure the child receives reassurance, first aid/medical assessment if needed and is supervised by a trusted adult. Inform the police and parents immediately. Do not conduct a pressured interview; record any spontaneous comments accurately and pass safeguarding concerns to the DSL/police.

5. Procedure: child missing on an outing

1. Immediate headcount Alert the outing lead. Gather the remaining children with their designated practitioners and complete a name-to-face check immediately.

2. Protect the group Maintain safe supervision and ratios for the remaining children. One or more staff search the immediate vicinity only where this can be done safely and without compromising the group.

3. Call 999 The outing lead/senior practitioner contacts the police promptly. Do not delay the police call while carrying out an extended search.

4. Notify the setting and parent/carer Contact the Nursery Manager/DSL if not present, then inform the parent/carer. Follow police advice on whether the remaining children should stay or return to the setting.

5. Provide key information Give police a recent photograph if available, the child's description, clothing, medical/SEND needs, last-seen location/time and any likely destinations or known risks.

6. Senior staff remain available A senior practitioner should remain at the relevant location, where safe and directed by police, to support the investigation and provide information.

7. Record and review Record the incident fully, preserve outing risk assessments/registers and begin the post-incident safeguarding review once the immediate emergency is resolved.

Important Staff must never leave the remaining children inadequately supervised in order to search. The safety of the whole group must be maintained throughout.

6. Unexplained or prolonged absence (child does not attend)

A child who does not arrive for a booked session is not treated in the same way as a child who disappears while in our care, but absence can be a safeguarding indicator. Jubilee Childcare Centre will therefore:

· follow up unexplained absences in a timely manner;

· attempt to contact parents/carers and alternative emergency contacts where there has been no notification or where the absence is prolonged;

· consider patterns and trends, the child's vulnerability, the parent/carer's vulnerability and the child's home circumstances;

· record all attempts to make contact and any information received;

· refer concerns to Kent Children's Social Care and/or request a police welfare check where professional judgement indicates this is necessary; and

· follow the separate Attendance Policy shared with parents/carers.

7. Notifications and safeguarding referrals

Police — Child missing / immediate danger. 999. Follow police instructions and retain incident/reference details.

Parent/carer — As soon as practicable without delaying emergency action. Provide factual updates and support; use emergency contacts if needed.

Kent Children's Social Care — Where there is a safeguarding concern or welfare concern requiring referral. 03000 41 11 11 (office hours); 03000 41 91 91 (out of hours). Immediate danger: 999.

Ofsted — Where the incident is a notifiable significant event or another notification duty applies. Registered provider/manager to notify as soon as reasonably possible and no later than 14 days after the event.

LADO / local safeguarding arrangements — Where the circumstances indicate a concern/allegation about an adult working with children. DSL/manager follows Kent allegations-management procedures without delay.

Provider / school leadership / insurer — In line with governance, insurance and internal reporting requirements. Provide accurate incident information and preserve confidentiality.

8. Post-incident investigation and review

After the immediate emergency, the Nursery Manager/DSL will lead a documented review. This is separate from any police, local authority, LADO or Ofsted process and must not interfere with external investigations.

· Obtain contemporaneous written accounts from staff, students and volunteers who were present.

· Create a clear timeline: registration, last confirmed sighting, headcounts, discovery, searches, calls, return/finding of the child and all external notifications.

· Review staffing levels, deployment, supervision, ratios, access control, transitions, collection arrangements, risk assessments and outing plans as relevant.

· Establish whether there was a breach of security, procedure or safeguarding practice and identify immediate corrective action.

· Consider whether disciplinary, capability, training, supervision, whistleblowing or safer recruitment processes need to be initiated.

· Update relevant risk assessments and procedures, brief staff and record actions to completion.

· Provide appropriate support to the child, family and staff while maintaining confidentiality.

9. Incident record: minimum information

· Child's full name and date of birth.

· Date, time and location of incident.

· Where and when the child was last definitely seen, and by whom.

· Staff and children present; staffing deployment and named person responsible for the child/group.

· Exact sequence of actions and searches undertaken.

· Times of calls to police, parents/carers, emergency contacts, social care, LADO, Ofsted or other agencies.

· Police incident/reference number and names/roles of professionals spoken to, where available.

· How and where the child was found/returned, their presentation, injuries or disclosures, and any medical action.

· Immediate safeguarding actions and follow-up actions.

· Manager review, conclusions, actions, responsible person and completion date.

Confidentiality and media Only the nominated senior spokesperson may communicate with the media. Staff must not post, message or discuss the incident on personal social media or with anyone who does not have a legitimate safeguarding need to know. Information should be shared lawfully and proportionately with relevant agencies.

10. Communication with other parents

Any communication to other families will be authorised by the manager/provider and, where the police or safeguarding agencies are involved, will take account of their advice. Information will be brief, factual and proportionate, protecting the identity and privacy of the child and family.

11. Staff responsibilities

All staff: Know this procedure, maintain active supervision, complete accurate registers/headcounts, challenge security risks and raise the alarm immediately if a child cannot be accounted for.

Key person / designated practitioner: Maintain awareness of children in their care, share relevant risk/vulnerability information appropriately and support accurate headcounts and handovers.

Nursery Manager / most senior practitioner: Coordinate the emergency response, police/parent contact, deployment, external notifications, record preservation and post-incident review.

DSL: Assess safeguarding implications, make or oversee referrals, liaise with statutory agencies and ensure the child's welfare remains central to all follow-up.

Provider / leadership: Ensure policies, staffing, premises security, training, supervision and governance are sufficient to prevent recurrence and meet statutory duties.

12. Statutory and guidance references

Department for Education: Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework for group and school-based providers – version effective 1 September 2026. GOV.UK.

Department for Education: Help for early years providers: Summary of the EYFS safeguarding requirements (published 16 July 2026).

Department for Education: Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 (updated 18 March 2026).

Ofsted: Childcare: significant events to notify Ofsted about – notifications should be made as soon as reasonably possible and no more than 14 days from the event where the duty applies.

Kent County Council: Report child abuse / Children's Social Care contact routes: 03000 41 11 11; out of hours 03000 41 91 91; immediate danger 999.

This policy is written for an England-based group early years setting. It should be read alongside Jubilee Childcare Centre's current safeguarding, attendance, outings, collection

and risk assessment procedures and any local Kent safeguarding guidance in force at the time of an incident.

13. Policy approval

Approved by:

Name / role:

Signature:

Date:

Next review date: September 2027 or sooner if required