

Warwickshire County Council Children Missing from Early Education (CMEE)

Guidance for early years providers (May 2021)

Whilst there is statutory guidance¹ for local authorities regarding children of statutory school age who are missing from education there is no equivalent national guidance for children of non-statutory school age (under 5s). This guidance had been developed to support all early years providers working with children aged from birth to five years. It focuses on good practice in relation to children's attendance and the action to take if a child:

- has one or more unexplained absences from the setting
- has attendance patterns which cause a concern or
- a child ceases to attend the setting

The statutory framework for the early years foundation stage welfare and safeguarding requirements that are relevant to this guidance are attached in Appendix 1

Nationally there have been a number of serious case reviews following the deaths of very young children (**Appendix 4**) who have attended an early years setting and subsequently fails to attend. The outcomes from these serious case reviews stress the importance of recognising when a child might be at risk and, of taking prompt action.

All agencies and services including early years providers are committed to working together to safeguard Warwickshire's children. Addressing attendance issues at the earliest possible stage is vital to ensuring children's safety and well-being. No child should be allowed to slip through the net and become a 'missing child'.

Children can be missing from a setting for a wide variety of reasons:

- Failing to make successful transition from home to setting
- Breakdown of the relationship between parent/setting
- Transfer to another setting
- Frequent moves of house including periods of homelessness or periods in a refuge
- Transience/family mobility
- Family breakdown
- Family circumstances such as finances, unemployment, bereavement
- Extended travel out of the country

Certain groups are more likely to be vulnerable:

- Children of families suffering bereavement, trauma, domestic violence, homelessness etc
- Children with special educational needs
- Children with English as an additional language
- Refugee and asylum-seeking children
- Gypsy, Roma, Traveller families
- Looked after children
- Teenage parenthood
- Parents or children with mental health issues

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

Good Practice Guidance

Contact information for children

- Ensure that you have up to date contact details for parents/carers including:
 - personal mobile number and email address
 - employment or training contact number and email address if available
 - at least one emergency contact number in addition to the above and more contacts if possible
- Ensure that parents/carers know and are reminded from time to time that they need to inform you of any change to the contact information

Attendance and absence

- Ensure that parents/carers understand that they need to inform you if the child is going to be absent, and share with them the steps that will be taken in the event that the child's absence is unexplained
- Ensure that children's attendance is recorded daily along with the reason given for any absence
- Monitor attendance and look for any patterns of absence that may indicate there is a need for support for the child and family

Action to be taken if a child has an unexplained absence – a step by step approach

See Appendix 2 for flow-chart

1. Check whether other staff have received a message or have information about the child's absence
2. Attempt to contact parents/carers using personal contact numbers – a phone call followed by a text message if necessary – if contact is made and there are no concerns no further action is required. If contact is made and concerns are raised you may need to contact other agencies or services in order to support the child and family, e.g. Health visitor. Record the absence, the reason and any action taken, in the child's file.
3. If contact is not made, attempt to contact the parent/carer on their employment or training contact number – state who you are and where you are calling from without disclosing what the call is about - ask to speak to the parent/carer. If contact is made and there are no concerns no further action is required. Record the absence and the reason in the child's file.
4. If unable to contact parents/carers contact any emergency contact(s) to try to establish the whereabouts of the parents/carer and child.
5. If you know that there are siblings and the school that they attend, contact the school, state who you are and where you are calling from and ask to speak to the DSL or Headteacher regarding a concern about a child. Check whether the sibling(s) are in school.

6. If sibling(s) are in school the DSL or Headteacher can check with them as to where the younger child is – there may be a simple explanation and parent/carer has forgotten to let you know.
7. If siblings are also absent check whether school has been able to contact parent/carer or emergency contacts. If no contact has been made discuss the risks with the DSL or headteacher and whether further action is needed. If no further action is needed on this occasion record all of the actions taken in the child's file.
8. If the child receives Early Education Funding contact the Early Years Funding team to check whether the child has been registered at another setting email: eyfunding@warwickshire.gov.uk
9. Consider posting a card or letter through the family's letterbox asking them to contact you as soon as possible. Please take in to account any possible risks to your own safety. **See Appendix 3 for a template**
10. If after following the steps above, no contact is made with the child and family, please notify Warwickshire Early Years Safeguarding Adviser that the child is potentially missing on **01926 742549** or **earlyyearsadvisors@warwickshire.gov.uk**
The child's details will be recorded on the CMEE database along with the provider details. Information will be shared with Warwickshire CME team and School Admissions as necessary.
11. If there are concerns that the child may be at risk of harm or significant harm, follow the setting's safeguarding procedures.
12. If the child is a 'looked after child' or is already known to Children's Services, you must contact the named Social Worker or the Mash team to inform them of the child's absence.

Early Years providers must attempt to contact parents/carers on the child's first day of absence.

If no contact has been made on the second day of absence and this is a family you have additional concerns about or the absence is out of the ordinary for this family you should contact the Police on 101 and ask for a safe and well check to be carried out.

Transition to the reception year in school:

Leaving an early years setting and starting school is a big step in a child and parents life. In your role as an early years provider, you can support the transition:

- build good links with your local schools and sharing information with children and parents
- share all relevant information regarding the child and family with the school, including any previous or existing concerns re: the child's attendance
- schools will, where possible, use the information they have from School Admissions to inform you which children they are expecting to start school in September. You may then be able to identify children who are not allocated a school place.
- if you are aware of any child whose parents/carers have not applied for a school place, establish the reason why and contact School Admissions
- schools may call you if children do not attend settling in sessions. Work with the child and family to:
 - establish reason(s) for non-attendance
 - raise awareness of the importance and benefits of attending settling in sessions including the need to attend all booked early years sessions where funding is being received due to financial audit processes
 - overcome concerns, misconceptions or barriers - e.g. the family may benefit from a member of the setting staff accompanying them on a visit to the new school

Children who are due to start school but will not be attending

If a family notifies you that their child will not be attending school or if a child continues to attend your provision despite being of the age where they could be in the reception class of a school, ensure:

- both you and the child's parents/carers are clear about the reasoning behind this (e.g. wishing to delay starting school, appealing against the school place offered, not aware their child could be in school and haven't applied for a place)
- parents/carers are advised to contact School Admissions on **01926 414143** or **admissions@warwickshire.gov.uk** if they have any questions
- the child's prospective school (if known) is made aware

If a family notifies you that they intend to home-school their child, be aware that parents/carers of non-statutory school age children do not legally have to notify anyone – but practically and from a safeguarding perspective it is much better if they inform the local authority home education team **01926 736323** or **ehe@warwickshire.gov.uk**

APPENDIX 1

Key welfare and safeguarding requirements from the statutory framework for the early years foundation stage²

3.68. Providers must maintain records and obtain and share information (with parents and carers, other professionals working with the child, the police, social services and Ofsted or the childminder agency with which they are registered, as appropriate) to ensure the safe and efficient management of the setting, and to help ensure the needs of all children are met.

3.69. Confidential information and records about staff and children must be held securely and only accessible and available to those who have a right or professional need to see them.

3.70. Providers must ensure that all staff understand the need to protect the privacy of the children in their care as well the legal requirements that exist to ensure that information relating to the child is handled in a way that ensures confidentiality.

3.71. Records relating to individual children must be retained for a reasonable period of time after they have left the provision (Individual providers should determine how long to retain records relating to individual children).

3.73 Providers must make the following information available to parents and/or carers: **details of the provider's policies and procedures** (all providers except childminders (see paragraph 3.3) must make copies available on request) including the procedure to be followed in the event of a parent and/or carer failing to collect a child at the appointed time, or **in the event of a child going missing at, or away from, the setting**

Key points from the Ofsted Inspection Framework:

Early years inspection handbook for Ofsted registered provision³

P45: 149 Although attendance at the setting is not mandatory, inspectors will explore how well providers work with parents to promote children's attendance so that the children form good habits for future learning. In particular, inspectors will consider the attendance of children for whom the provider receives early years pupil premium.

Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings⁴

P16: 36 In line with statutory guidance, inspectors will gather evidence as to whether staff in all settings are sensitive to signs of possible safeguarding concerns. These include poor or irregular attendance, persistent lateness, or children missing from education.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-handbook-eif>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-safeguarding-in-early-years-education-and-skills>

APPENDIX 2 Children missing from early education (CMEE) flowchart

Action to be taken on child's first day of absence

1. **Check** whether other staff have received a message or have information about the child's absence

2. Attempt to **contact** parents/carers using personal contact information. **Contact made:** no concerns, no further action required. **Concerns raised:** contact other agencies or services as appropriate e.g. Health visitor. **Record** absence, reason and action taken, in the child's file.

3. **Contact not made:** attempt to contact the parent/carer on their employment or training contact number – state who you are and where you are calling from without disclosing what the call is about - ask to speak to the parent/carer. **Contact made:** no concerns: no further action is required. **Concerns raised:** contact other agencies or services as appropriate e.g. Health visitor. **Record** absence, reason and action taken, in child's file.

4. **No contact with parents/carers:** contact any emergency contact(s) to try to establish the whereabouts of the parents/carer and child. **No contact or no information** from emergency contacts: proceed to **Step 5** or **Step 8** or **Step 9**

5. If you know that there are siblings and the school that they attend, **contact the school**, state who you are and where you are calling from and ask to speak to the DSL or Headteacher regarding a concern about a child. **Check** whether the sibling(s) are in school.

6. **Sibling(s)** in school: DSL/headteacher can check with them as to where the younger child is – **no concerns:** record in child's file concerns follow **Steps 8 – 12** as appropriate

7. **Siblings absent:** check whether school has made contact with parent/carer or emergency contacts. **No contact:** discuss the risks with the DSL/headteacher and whether further action is needed. **No further action needed:** record actions taken in the child's file. **Further action required:** agree with school or proceed to **Step 8** or **Step 9** or **Step10** as appropriate.



8. **Early Education Funded child:** contact the **Early Years Funding team** to check whether the child has been registered at another setting email: eyfunding@warwickshire.gov.uk



9. **Consider** posting a **card or letter** through the family's letterbox asking them to contact you as soon as possible. Please take in to account any possible risks to your safety.



10. **No contact:** notify Warwickshire Early Years Safeguarding Adviser **01926 742549** or earlyyearsadvisors@warwickshire.gov.uk



11. **If this is a family you have additional concerns about or the absence is out of the ordinary for this family you should contact the Police** on 101 and ask for a **safe and well check** to be carried out



12. **'Looked after child'** or **known** to Children's Social Care, **DSL** must contact the named Social Worker or the Mash team.

If at any point in this process you are concerned about a child and believe them to be at risk of harm or significant harm contact MASH on 01926 414144

APPENDIX 3 Children missing from early education (CMEE) Request for contact template

If at any point in this process you are concerned about a child and believe them to be at risk of harm or significant harm contact MASH on 01926 414144

This template has been designed in order to protect confidentiality in the event that the parent/carer and family no longer reside at the address on the setting records.

The template should include the setting's logo if available.

Settings may wish to hand deliver the request for contact or alternatively it can be emailed to the parent/carer email address that the setting has on file.

INSERT SETTING LOGO
NAME OF SETTING
ADDRESS OF SETTING
TELEPHONE No.
Email address
INSERT Date

Dear Parent/Carer

I/We have tried to contact you today to discuss an important matter.

Please contact **INSERT NAME OF CHILDMINDER/MANAGER or DSL** as soon as possible.

If I/we do not hear from you by **INSERT date and time** (this would normally be the next day) **we will ask the police to carry out a safe and well check**

Yours sincerely

INSERT NAME AND SIGNATURE OF **CHILDMINDER/MANAGER OR DSL**

APPENDIX 4 Children who were missing from early education

'The kids were left with my dead husband'

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29 January 2018

A bereaved mother is calling for schools to make extra checks on pupils who do not turn up. Helen Daykin's little girls spent almost 24 hours with the body of their father after his sudden death.

She says: "There's no reason why this couldn't happen again. How the children didn't hurt themselves I've no idea."

The government may ask schools in England to make extra checks, including keeping an extra contact number to call when children don't turn up.

Helen Daykin can only now bring herself to speak about the day her husband, Chris, died unexpectedly, just over a year ago.

She often travelled away for work while he looked after their two small daughters, Pearl and Iris.

Sometimes it was to the other side of the world, that week it was just to London from their home, in Halifax.

When she rang in the morning she thought he was busy with the school run, then later that he might have lost his phone as there was no answer.

At teatime, her mother drove over but couldn't open the door because Chris had left the keys in on the other side.

The milk was outside, the windows dark, so the police were called to break down the door. "I got on the train, and at 20:00 I got a call to say my husband had died but the children were OK," Helen says.

Pearl, who was four years old, had started school just a few weeks earlier. Iris was two. Chris had been a devoted father, he took photos of his girls almost every day.

Helen says they were found by the police, in bed with his dead body.

Chris had died suddenly of heart failure the night before.

Pearl and Iris couldn't "wake" him during the day, but the girls found indigestion tablets and put them in his mouth to "make him better".

Helen thinks Pearl understood on some level that Chris had died.

"They spent the whole day upstairs, they didn't come down at all. They were hungry. They played with all my shoes and makeup, but they didn't venture further in the house."

Helen says the trauma has stayed with the girls.

"Pearl can tell me every single detail and relives it often. I can't leave the room without her shouting for me or wanting to be with me."

When a child doesn't attend, a school will normally call their contact number to check whether they are ill.

Pearl's school had tried Chris's number, but didn't ring Helen.

Helen wants all schools to overhaul how they check up on children who don't arrive at school. She says second and third contact numbers and home visits should be part of their plans.

Helen's campaign for better awareness is being backed by the Good Grief Trust charity, which has provided support through her bereavement.

Its founder, Linda Magistris, said: "A parent dies in this country every 22 minutes, and that could be one of those parents that are by themselves, nobody knows they're by themselves with the children." Helen says her girls may need long-term counselling, but is deeply grateful they came to no harm. It could have been worse.

Last year an inquest found Chadrack Mulo, four, had died of dehydration and starvation next to the body of his mother, Esther Eketi-Mulo.

In October 2016 Esther had a fatal epileptic fit, and Chadrack who had special needs, spent two weeks in their flat unable to get help.

The coroner's report describes how school staff called his mother's number several times. They also tried to visit twice, but couldn't get into the block of flats.

The coroner called for the government to make changes and set out the policy subsequently put in place at Chadrack's school:

Three contact numbers are kept for every child

If a pupil fails to attend with no explanation, someone is immediately sent to the family home

If there is no response, the police are contacted

These policies are up to individual schools to review, but the government is now asking if they should be obliged to keep an extra contact number to check on children.

Jim Gamble wants the government to go further.

As chair of the independent safeguarding board in Hackney he commissioned a report after Chadrack's death which has yet to be published.

He says the government needs to "breathe life" into policies to put child safety first, and prevent another tragedy if a loving parent like Esther dies unexpectedly.

"Her child starved to death feet from a fridge where there was plenty of food. A child that was loved."

Jim Gamble says they'll be sending their report to ministers even though it might not be something that happens every year.

What we want to do is put in place measures that will stop anyone being lost in plain sight again