**Missing Child Policy**

## SoCo Music Project

**Policy statement**

Links to the Early Years Foundation Stage: Safeguarding and Welfare Requirements: Safety and Suitability of premises, environment and equipment: Outings 3.64

SoCo Music Project 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. To ensure that children are not lost while in our care, we:

* undertake periodic head counts using the key person system in addition to the registration procedure.
* Maintain appropriate staff:child ratios.
* Closely monitor children in and out of the building, ensuring that when children sign in and out the sheet is taken with staff along with emergency contact details.
* Ensure that visitors to the premises are always supervised.
* Ensure risk assessments are carried out in every area.

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 from the premises or leaving unaccompanied.**

SoCo Music Project is responsible for the missing child and all the other children in the setting. We will:

* Alert the area lead as soon as it is noticed that a child is missing. They will then establish who last saw the missing child, where and when.
* The remaining children will be gathered into one large group, with one/two adults, leaving the remaining adults to search the premises systematically.
* Ensure all adults are aware of the situation.
* A register will be taken to make sure that no other children have gone astray and the children will be asked if they have seen the child that is missing.
* The doors will be checked to see if there has been a breach of security whereby a child could wander out.
* Seek the cooperation of any other users of the building.
* The area lead will carry out an investigation into the incident.

**If the child cannot be found, the area lead will contact the child’s parents as follows:**

* Call the child’s parents to warn them that the child may be attempting to get home.
* If they are unavailable we will use the emergency contact number.
* Ensure that, if the child lives within walking distance of the setting, one adult will make the journey on foot in order to catch up with or intercept the child if possible.
* Remember, that as soon as parents are informed, they will need advice and support.

**Police**

* If the above steps do not locate the child, the police will be contacted to report the child missing.

**Procedure for a child going missing on an outing**

Though it is not likely that children will be taken off site by SoCo Music Project staff, in the event of an outing being organised and a child being lost while on that trip the following procedures will be adhered to:

* As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, staff members on the outing will ask children to stand with their designated carer and carry out a headcount to ensure that no other child has gone astray.
* One staff member will search the immediate vicinity, but will not search beyond that.
* Our senior staff member on the outing will contact the police and report that child as missing.
* The area lead will be contacted immediately (if not on the outing) and the incident will be recorded.
* The area lead will contact the child’s parent(s).
* Our staff will take the remaining children back to SoCo premises as soon as possible.
* According to the advice of the police, a senior member of staff, or our manager where applicable, should remain at the site where the child went missing and wait for the police to arrive.
* A recent photo and a description of what the child is wearing is given to the police.
* The CEO will carry out an investigation into the incident.

**Informing other people**

We will ensure that:

* We make regular checks to ensure that if an incident of this sort does happen, we have all the necessary phone numbers at hand – correct, up to date and kept together.
* If the police are called then the Southampton’s Safeguarding Children’s Board will be informed.

**The investigation**

The CEO will carry out a full investigation, taking written statements from all our staff and volunteers who were present. They will:

* Speak with the parent(s) and explain the process of the investigation.
* The parent(s) may also raise a complaint with the organisation, local authority, or Charity Commission.
* Each member of staff present will write an incident report detailing:
	+ The date and time of the incident.
	+ Where the child went missing from e.g. the setting or an outing venue.
	+ Which staff/children were in 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 in the premises/or on the outing, including the time it is estimated that the child went missing. What has taken place in the premises or on the outing since the child went missing.

The report is counter-signed by the senior member of staff and the date and time added.

* A conclusion is drawn as to how the breach of security happened.
* If the incident warrants a police investigation, all our staff will 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.
* The insurance provider is informed.

**People management**

We accept that in such circumstances powerful emotions are involved 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 will 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 ensures that any staff under investigation are not only fairly treated, but receive support while feeling vulnerable.
* The parents will feel angry, and fraught. They may want to blame our staff and may single out one staff member over others; they may direct their anger at our CEO. When dealing with a distraught and angry parent, there should always be two members of staff, one of whom is a senior manager and the other should be our CEO. No matter how understandable the parent’s anger may be, aggression or threats against our staff are not tolerated, and the police should 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.
* In accordance with the severity of the final outcome, 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. Our CEO will use their discretion to decide what action to take.
* Our staff must not discuss any missing child incident with the press without taking advice.

**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 the CEO to be the one who speaks for the setting. All adults will be asked to refer all enquiries to the agreed spokesperson.

**Informing other parents**

We recognise that other parents will need to be given brief, accurate information as rapidly as possible. We will ensure that this happens by either:

* Calling a short meeting when parents/carers collect children, or
* Talking to parents/carers when they arrive at the next session, or
* Sending a note home with each child.



Matt Salvage – CEO

Date of last review 9th August 2023