



Leafy Legends Forest School Lost Child Procedure

Purpose

To ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children by providing a clear, calm, and coordinated response in the event that a child becomes lost or absconds from the Forest School site.

We recognise that moments of separation can be distressing for both children and adults. This procedure is designed to protect children physically and emotionally, while supporting staff to act confidently and compassionately.

Prevention Measures

- **Clear boundaries:** Visual markers (e.g. flags, ropes, natural features) define safe zones
- **Headcounts:** Conducted at the start, mid-point, and end of each session
- **Buddy system:** Children are paired or grouped during exploration
- **Staff positioning:** Adults are placed strategically to monitor movement
- **Emotional attunement:** Staff remain alert to signs of withdrawal, anxiety, or dysregulation that may precede wandering

Immediate Response Steps

1. **Confirm the child is missing**
 - Conduct a calm headcount
 - Check known hiding spots and quiet areas
 - Ask other children if they've seen the child
2. **Alert the team**
 - Use agreed verbal signal or whistle
 - One adult leads the search
 - One adult remains with the group to maintain safety and calm
3. **Search the area**
 - Check site boundaries, paths, dens, and nearby field edges
 - Avoid panic — maintain a calm tone and presence
 - Use child's name gently and reassuringly
4. **Escalate if needed**
 - If child is not found within 5–10 minutes, contact:
 - **Lead Practitioner / DSL**
 - **School office or emergency contact**
 - **Emergency services** (if appropriate)
5. **Reunite and reassure**
 - Welcome child back with warmth and calm

- Check for physical and emotional wellbeing
- Offer quiet space, comfort items, and gentle conversation
- Avoid blame or shaming — focus on safety and reconnection

Aftercare & Documentation

- Record incident in the **Safeguarding & Incident Log**
- Inform parents/carers with clarity and compassion
- Hold staff debrief to reflect and improve practice
- Review site layout, boundaries, and emotional support strategies
- Update risk assessments if needed

Emotional Safety

- Children are supported to share why they wandered or hid
- Staff respond with curiosity, not criticism
- Emotional needs are acknowledged and addressed
- Follow-up support is offered if child shows signs of distress or anxiety

Related Policies

- Safeguarding Policy
- Risk Assessment Policy
- Behaviour & Emotional Wellbeing Policy
- Abscondment Policy
- Emergency Procedures Policy
