

Missing Student Policy (March 2018)

Introduction

OPDS is committed to promoting safeguarding and the welfare of our students. When a child goes missing or leaves their school or host family, they are at risk. Safeguarding children therefore includes protecting them from this risk.

This policy sets out the steps that OPDS should take to prevent children from going missing and to protect them when they do go missing.

1. MISSING FROM SCHOOL

- 1.1. OPDS as a guardianship service provider expects all schools we deal with to have a clear Missing Student Policy. They must enter pupils on the admission register at the beginning of the school day. If a pupil fails to attend on the agreed or notified date, the school should undertake reasonable enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts and consider notifying OPDS at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.2. OPDS also has the responsibility of notifying the school of any absence a child has, together with the reason for that absence. Where appropriate, it may be necessary to seek and obtain their parents' permission for such absence.
- 1.3. When OPDS is notified by the school of a child's absence, OPDS will attempt to establish the whereabouts of the child as a matter of urgency. Where the child cannot be contacted directly, it may be necessary to contact a variety of other persons, including host families, friends and parents.
- 1.4. Should all these attempts fail, OPDS will take the extreme step of reporting the child as a missing person to the Police.

2. MISSING FROM HOST FAMILY

- 2.1. OPDS as a guardianship service provider expects all host families we deal with to have a clear understanding of a child's whereabouts during their stay with the family.
- 2.2. The family is expected to know the contact details of the child so they can contact them if they do not return home by the expected deadline.

- 2.3.If a child fails to return by the expected time, the family should undertake reasonable enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts and notify OPDS at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.4.OPDS also has the responsibility of notifying the family for any reason that a child may change their daily plan, hence returning late if OPDS is notified by the child or parents. When the notified late returning time is beyond a reasonable hour, parents' permission must be obtained for such lateness.
- 2.5.When OPDS is notified by the host family that a child is missing, OPDS will attempt to establish the whereabouts of the child by contacting the child, the school and parents using all means of communication.

3. WHEN A CHILD GOES MISSING

- 3.1.If a child is missing for 24 hours, OPDS will contact the local police to report the missing child and work with the police, school and host family to locate the missing child and establish the possible reason for their actions.

4. WHEN A CHILD IS FOUND

- 4.1.OPDS will adopt a supportive approach, actively listening and responding to a child's needs. This will have a greater chance of preventing the child from going missing again and safeguarding them against other risks.
- 4.2.OPDS will work with the local authority and police to carry out safe and well-being checks as soon as possible after a child who has been reported as missing, is found.
- 4.3.The objective of this is to check for any indication as to whether the child has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been, and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them.

5. INDEPENDENT RETURN INTERVIEWS

- 5.1. When a child is found, they must be offered an independent return interview. Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.
- 5.2. The interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child returning to their school or host family setting. This should be an in-depth interview and is normally best carried out by an independent person (i.e. someone not involved in caring for the child) who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge. OPDS recognises that children sometimes need to build up trust with a person before they will discuss in depth the reasons why they went missing.

6. REVIEW

- 6.1. This policy will be reviewed from time to time by the Company and will be amended, where appropriate.
- 6.2. Any comments or suggestions about the policy and procedure should be referred to Sunny Field on 02086 608869 or by email at sunny.field@opds.co.uk.