

Missing Student Policy

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 takes to prevent children from going missing and to protect them if they do.

Every student has contact details for their appointed guardian consultant and the OPDS Emergency Number. For reference the 24/7 Emergency number is 07842 303240.

Missing From School

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 register at the beginning of each school day. If a pupil fails to attend at the required time, the school should undertake reasonable enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts and notify OPDS at the earliest opportunity, if appropriate to do so.

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.

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 people, including host families, friends and parents.

Should all these attempts fail, OPDS will take the extreme step of reporting the child as a missing person to the Police.

Missing From a Host Family

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 them.

The family is expected to have the student phone number(s) to hand so they can contact them for any reason, especially if they do not return home by the expected deadline.

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.

OPDS also has the responsibility of notifying the host family should there be a change of plan for any reason, for example returning late where OPDS is notified of this by the child or parents.

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.

When a Child Goes Missing for Any Reason

As soon as OPDS has been notified that a child is missing, we will do everything possible to locate the child as described previously. Once we have done this, if our efforts prove unsuccessful, we will not delay in reporting the missing child to the police.

We will work with the police, school and host family to locate the missing child and establish the possible reason(s) for their actions.

When a Child is Found

OPDS will work with the police and any other agencies involved to ensure the child's safety and wellbeing.

Once the circumstances surrounding the disappearance have been established we will take all steps necessary to ensure that it doesn't happen again and the child is at no further risk.

We will always adopt a supportive approach to ensure that the child is aware of their rights and understands what is happening at all times.

Independent Return Home Interviews

Where a case has been referred to the local authority, the child must be offered an Independent Return Home Interview by them as soon as possible after they are found. Independent return home 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.

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 which is best carried out by an independent person (ie, 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.

As part of the OPDS DSL responsibility, we will follow through with this process until a satisfactory conclusion has been reached and document our files accordingly.

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