



# UNACCOUNTED FOR CHILD & ABSCONDING POLICY

## POLICY RATIONALE

TeamKids is committed to meet the safety and security needs of children who attend its service or during and excursion/regular outing. For the wellbeing and safety of all children, the service has developed procedures to provide direction to educators, as to how to respond to children who try or succeed in absconding from a service or excursion/regular outing. This policy will guide educators in managing these types of behaviours.

## UNACCOUNTED FOR CHILD

When a child cannot be accounted for at the service, the Responsible Person must act immediately and follow the steps outlined below:

### ☐ **Confirm Attendance:**

- Conduct a headcount to confirm the total number of children in attendance.
- Perform a roll call to identify which child cannot be accounted for, if not already known.

### ☐ **Notify and Initiate Search:**

- Inform all educators about the unaccounted-for child.
- Educators will immediately search the space the group is currently occupying (e.g., indoors, outdoors, or on an excursion). Consider the activities at the time the child went missing, as this may provide clues about their likely direction.

### ☐ **Expand the Search:**

- If the child is not located in the initial area, the search will expand to additional spaces within the school grounds, such as outdoors if the group was indoors.

### ☐ **Escalate if Necessary:**

- If the child cannot be located within the school grounds and there is reason to believe they may have left the premises, **contact the Police immediately.**
- The Responsible Person will assess how many educators can assist in the search while ensuring adequate supervision for the remaining children.

### ☐ **Inform Key Parties:**

- Notify the Regional Manager, who will attend the service to provide support.
- Contact the child's parent/guardian to inform them of the situation, provide updates on the progress of the search, and notify them as soon as the child has been located.

### ☐ **Continue the Search:**

- Expand the search to include areas outside the service premises, such as surrounding streets or public areas.
- Refer to the child's personal details, such as their home address, to guide the search.
- Collaborate with emergency services and follow their guidance until the child is found.

### ☐ **Resolution and Reporting:**

- Inform parents/guardians immediately once the child has been located.
- Complete a detailed incident report on the same day, outlining the events and actions taken.

- Initiate an internal investigation to identify contributing factors and implement any necessary improvements to procedures or training.

## **ABSCONDING CHILD**

### **WHAT IS ABSCONDING & WHY MAY IT OCCUR**

Absconding is when a child leaves a service, the grounds in which the service is located, or from the group when on an excursion/regular outing, with or without educators' knowledge. Usually, this is a purposeful action by the child. This may be from the approved spaces, from the school/venue grounds in which the service operates, or from the venue where an excursion/regular outing is being held.

Sometimes children will engage in 'wandering', where they may leave the supervised space and they may not realise they have left the group. This may be due to additional needs or an unexpected event/trigger.

Absconding may occur for a number of reasons, including but not limited to:

- Children can find the Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) environment challenging at times. There may be factors that trigger reactions that make them feel like they want to leave the space they are in. This can include arguments with other children, loss of a game they're engaged in, a lack of engagement in the experiences, resources, service or excursion/regular outing environment, their own perspective that they have been unfairly treated (for example, by another child or educator).
- Some children decide they'd prefer to be at home than at the service or excursion/regular outing venue and often they are familiar with the area in which they are and how to go home. They may know their parent/family member is home and want to be with them or be aware that they are not home and wish to be in their home environment.
- Emotional dysregulation. This is when a child feels overwhelmed, angry, anxious or fearful and they may show this by showing an emotional outburst such as crying or shouting, by being physically aggressive, by self-harming, or by running away (absconding).
- Some children may plan to leave the service or excursion/regular outing in advance. They may have made a plan with other children or on their own, to leave when an educator has turned their back, or is occupied with another child/task.

### **HOW TO RECOGNISE A CHILD WHO MAY ABSCOND**

Children who abscond may or may not provide a sign of what may be about to occur. They may show signs such as:

- Walking towards a door or looking like they are about to leave. Usually, these children will either look around to see if they are being watched or avoid eye contact
- Children may utilise a space where they feel they cannot be seen as easily, to leave. For example, leaving out a rear door of a bathroom or a gate in the outdoor space.

## PROCEDURES WHEN A CHILD ATTEMPTS TO ABSCOND

1. Approach the child and ask them to stop, explaining why they need to stay with the group. For example, to stay safe or stay within educator's sight.
2. Walk either alongside the child or slightly behind and talk to the child in a calm voice, asking them to turn around and return to the remainder of the group.
3. Suggest experiences that the child may wish to engage in (using any knowledge of what their interests are).
4. Stay with/near the child until they either return to the approved space or until the child's family/guardian arrive to collect.
5. Notify the family and in partnership with the service Regional Manager, determine any further action according to the Behaviour Guidance Matrix. [Behaviour Support Matrix - June 2024.pdf](#)
6. Complete an incident report on the event.

## PROCEDURES WHEN A CHILD ABSCONDS

1. Approach the child and ask them to stop, explaining why they need to stay with the group. For example, to stay safe or stay within educator's sight.
2. Walk either alongside the child or slightly behind and talk to the child in a calm voice, asking them to turn around and return to the remainder of the group.
3. Suggest experiences that the child may wish to engage in (using any knowledge of what their interests are).
4. Do not stop following the child, if they move out of your sight (e.g. round a corner of your view may be obscured by an object), continue moving in the direction the child was moving
5. Where possible, communicate with the educator(s) who remain at the service to ensure they are up to date with the incident either through a walkie talkie or mobile phone.
6. Contact the service Regional Manager as soon as practicable for support and call the family/guardian. The family/guardian may be able to meet the educator following the child, to support a safe return or collection.
7. The Regional Manager will notify a member of the Quality & Compliance team as soon as practicable through a phone call, if the child leaves the approved space.
8. Do not touch/restrain the child unless the child is in immediate danger, such as attempting to cross a road. The possibility for restraint in an emergency is described in the TeamKids – Interactions with Children Policy. [Interactions-with-Children-Policy - Sept 2024.doc](#)
9. Call 000 if you lose sight of the child or if the child appears to be placing themselves in danger by not following the guidance of the educator.
10. When the child has returned to the service, DOS/RP to contact the family/guardian to arrange for the child to be collected.
11. Complete an incident report
12. The Regional Manager should receive the completed incident report by the end of the session to review and make any necessary amendments. This is to be sent to the Quality and Compliance team on that same day, so it can be notified to the Regulatory Authority within 24 hours.
13. The child will be suspended according to the behaviour guidance matrix and a re-entry meeting to be scheduled. This may include the development of a behaviour support plan for the child.
14. Any suspensions will be noted to ensure the Customer Service Team are able to make any required changes to the child's bookings/fees charged.
15. Regional Manager to notify the Child Wellbeing and Inclusion team, for further support if required. This may include discussion regarding preparation of a behaviour support plan or the review of a current behaviour support plans, possible funding applications to meet the support needs of the child, reflecting on the circumstances of the incident, or suspension of the child's future attendance.

## REFERENCES:

ACECQA National Quality Framework

Quality Area 2 – Children’s health and safety

Quality Area 6 – Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011),

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