

Merton Mencap

Missing Service User Procedure

Last reviewed
March 2023

Next review
March 2025

**This policy and procedure has been adopted by Merton Mencap
through its Executive Committee which remains responsible for its review**

MERTON MENCAP

MISSING SERVICE USER PROCEDURE

General

This document sets out the procedure if a service user goes missing whilst attending Merton Mencap's services and activities where the charity is responsible for their care.

In this document, staff or staff member refers to employees, bank workers and volunteers; people with a learning disability/autism attending our services and activities are referred to as service users.

This document should be read within the context of the other Merton Mencap policies and procedures designed to ensure the safety and security of service users, in particular, risk assessment.

The relevant Service Manager should ensure the person in charge of services or activities on the day has access to this procedure.

Care planning

The Services Manager is responsible for ensuring care plans for service users include information if a service user has a history of going missing or putting themselves at risk of harm. The person in charge of the activity on the day (eg team Leader) is responsible for ensuring staff are aware of service users who pose this risk.

At the start of a service or activity, it is the responsibility of the person in charge to ensure

- adequate staff are present to ensure service user supervision during sessions (including during staff breaks) and advise the Service Manager straight away if there isn't
- access to service user contact details (eg Lamplight)
- a register is taken at the start
- named staff are allocated to monitor service users; staff are encouraged to note the description of their allocated service user (eg colour of clothes)
- regular headcounts are carried out especially when during transitions (eg entering / leaving transportation or premises)
- authorised mobile phones are switched on and staff have each other's numbers
- staff and service users know what to do if someone becomes lost (eg meeting points)

In the case of a community-based activity involving service users, we will encourage service users to carry some kind of identification, including, where practicable, contact details for a responsible person at Merton Mencap and their parent or carer. This may be provided to the service users, depending on the circumstances.

Procedure if a service user goes missing

Throughout the following procedure, it is important for all staff to maintain personal calm and to cause as little anxiety as possible to other service users. Any staff who suspect a service user is missing should immediately alert the person in charge on the day.

The person in charge should

- ✓ note the time the service user was first noticed missing
- ✓ discuss with staff the possible reasons for the absence
- ✓ establish as much as possible about the service user, eg particularly note the colour and type of clothing and any accessories (eg hats), how they are likely to behave, whether they have a mobile phone which is called
- ✓ agree with staff a search action plan ensuring the safety of other service users
- ✓ arrange a thorough search of the area and vicinity including access routes leading to and from the location.
- ✓ arrange for local help to be notified within 5-10 minutes of the service user missing, for example, Lifeguard, Shop/Venue Manager, Theme Park Guest Services, providing the following information
 - a description of the missing person
 - indication of the service user's relevant abilities – e.g. physical mobility, communication skills
 - information about any particular behaviour patterns that may be relevant to their absence or
 - their likely reaction to feeling lost and needing to seek and/or receive help

Once the help point has been informed, the person in charge should advise their line manager of the situation who will support action to locate the service user, plus advising the parent/responsible carer who may be able to assist.

If the missing service user is not found during the initial search, the help point has confirmed that they have no further information about the person, and the service user's parent or responsible carer has been informed, the local police and local hospital should be notified by the relevant manager. The precise timing of this will depend on the person's age, competency and level of vulnerability.

The person in charge must consider risk factors and/or information that could help police and others to find the missing service user and to support them once they are found such as:

- Name, gender and age of missing person
- Clothing and accessories (eg hat)
- Name and address of place last seen
- Description of any distinguishing physical characteristics, features and behaviour
- Sensory ability (vision, hearing etc.)
- Mental capacity
- Vulnerability to exploitation by other e.g. theft of money, physical abuse, abduction
- Proximity of the session to major hazards e.g. water, main road
- Health risk factors e.g. extent of any disability, medication regimes (e.g. epilepsy, diabetes, medication and time scales between administration)
- Ability to communicate effectively with others and convey to others who they are, a contact person, where they are from and where they are going to
- Ability to negotiate own transport arrangements
- Risk of deterioration in both physical and mental health
- Risk of suicide
- Details of any known previous episodes of the service user going missing
- Risk of exhaustion / ill health from heat, cold, wet, snow or other weather-related factors (is their clothing appropriate for the weather?)
- Whether the service user has shown any unusual behaviour which may help to indicate where they have gone e.g. repeating the name of a sibling or family member or talking repeatedly about a specific outing

If the missing service user is found, the person in charge should ensure that all parties who were advised are immediately informed.

The person in charge should check service user for signs of injury, providing first aid if necessary, and whether they have been subject to any form of harm and take relevant action, eg notify ambulance, the police.

The person in charge should complete an Incident Report that day which is passed to their relevant manager.

Follow up

1. The matter must be reported to the Chief Executive on the day who will advise the Chair of Trustees
2. The Chief Executive should promptly investigate the incident and report findings and recommended action plan to the Chair of Trustees
3. Learnings identified by the Chief Executive should be advised to relevant managers and staff to plan against a reoccurrence

4. The Chief Executive will write to the parent or responsible carer with details of the incident, the findings of the subsequent investigation and details of any action plan.

Internal Audit Guidance

Check	Evidence
Are all staff and volunteers familiar with this policy	Ask staff about it, providing scenarios
Was the policy followed in the event of a missing person?	Check records relating to incidents Check minutes of ECM to ascertain reporting
Check preventative steps	Check staff aware of all they can do to prevent a missing person, e.g. staff allocations, ensuring supervision at all times, headcounts