

**Merton Mencap**

**Missing Service User  
Procedure**

**July 2017**



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

**Original signed version is kept at the Merton Mencap office.**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Chair of Executive Committee**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Chief Executive**

**Record of adoption and review of this policy and procedure:-**

**Adopted:** 16 September 2009  
**Reviewed:** 28 June 2011  
**Reviewed:** 14 July 2017

## MERTON MENCAP

### MISSING SERVICE USER PROCEDURE

#### ***General***

This document sets out the procedure to be followed if a service user goes missing whilst involved with Merton Mencap's services or activities.

In this document, staff or staff member refers to employees and bank workers.

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 assessments relating to that service or activity. In the case of service users with a learning disability, reference should also be made to the personal profile form and individual risk assessment or care plan.

A copy of this procedure is provided to the person in charge of each service or activity, and it is the responsibility of that person to communicate the content to all staff involved with that activity.

#### ***Prior to the activity***

The Projects Manager should ensure that individual risk assessments have been completed or updated within the last 12 months for all service users deemed to be at risk of going missing. All care plans should state whether the service user has any history of going missing or putting themselves at risk of harm when in the community. Where a service user is a fully independent traveler, this fact should be recorded on their care plan and risk assessment if they have one.

The person in charge of the activity on the day (e.g. Team Leader) is responsible for ensuring that all staff / volunteers who are accompanying or supporting service users have been made aware of and understand the actions required in individual risk assessments. Individual risk assessments must be filed in an appropriate place (e.g. with the service user's care plan) and be available to all staff whilst at the setting or outing.

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

- ensure that service users can be safely supported at all times (e.g. enough staff and volunteers are present)
- take a register which should be a full list of service users undertaking the outing or activity including emergency contact numbers and an up to date photograph
- make sure that regular headcounts are carried out, especially when entering / leaving transportation or premises

- ensure that the staff / volunteer to service user ratio (as defined for that session by the Projects Manager) is adhered to at all times and that there is no lapse in this ratio during the session e.g. due to staff taking smoking breaks, staff dealing with a service user's personal care needs, or volunteers taking a short trip to the kitchen area to collect drinks/snacks
- assign named people to keep track of service users identified as a risk for wandering or absconding and make a record of this at the start of the session to avoid any confusion (note: the person in charge will not be allocated 1:1 responsibility for a service user)
- ensure that staff or volunteers who are allocated Merton Mencap mobile phones have them with them and have shared their telephone numbers with other staff and volunteers at the session
- encourage staff or volunteers to note a description of the service user they are responsible for (e.g. the colour of their clothes) in case this information is needed later
- establish, as far as possible, that service users know what to do if they are lost

In the case of a community-based activity involving service users with a learning disability, Merton Mencap 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 amongst other service users.

1. Any staff or volunteers who suspect that a service user is missing should immediately report this to the senior staff member present such as the team leader.
2. The person in charge of the activity should note the time when the service user was first noticed missing and must make a note of every subsequent action, including times.
3. The person in charge should discuss with other staff and service users the possible reasons for the absence, in a way that does not generate concern or anxiety.
4. The person in charge should agree an action plan with the staff and volunteers present (including the possibility of returning other service users back home early, system for ensuring the safety and security of other service users whilst a search is made but not causing undue anxiety)
5. The person in charge should organise a thorough search of the building, surrounding areas, grounds, and vicinity including a check of all rooms in the building. This should take no more than 10 minutes.

6. Consider any precautionary action that could quickly, safely and easily be taken to locate the service user before they get too far away e.g. immediately sending someone to check / monitor any access routes leading to and from the location.
7. The person in charge should arrange for the local help point to be notified within 5 minutes of not being able to locate the service user, for example, Lifeguard, Shop/Venue Manager, Theme Park Guest Services. In such instances, it is important that the following information can be provided:
  - a. a description of the missing person
  - b. some indication of the service user's relevant abilities – e.g. physical mobility, communication skills
  - c. information about any particular behaviour patterns that may be relevant to their absence or their reaction to feeling lost and needing to seek and/or receive help
8. Once the help point has been informed, the person in charge should contact the relevant Projects Manager or Chief Executive without delay and advise them of the situation. The relevant Projects Manager or Chief Executive will immediately notify the parent or responsible carer about the missing service user. This must happen as soon as the staff at the project or activity have completed the initial 10-minute search and are sure that the service user is missing rather than hiding (e.g. in the bathroom) or momentarily out of sight (e.g. behind the minibus which dropped them off or that they have remained on the minibus by accident).

The parent or carer may choose to join the search or may decide to remain at home in case the service user returns there; this decision must be made by the parent or carer concerned as they will know their family member best and are the most likely to be able to predict where they have gone, and why. The person in charge should ask parents, carers and others who know the service user e.g. head teacher, community nurse, about likely behaviour and try to obtain information about previous address(s) or “old haunts” to which the service users may return.

9. 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 carer has been informed, the local police and local hospital should be notified by the team leader, Projects Manager or Chief Executive. The precise timing of this will depend on the person's age, competency and level of vulnerability.
10. 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
  - Name and address of place last seen
  - Description of any distinguishing physical characteristics, marks or 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?)
- Has the service user 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

11. Once the missing person has been located or has returned, the person in charge should ensure that all parties who were advised are immediately contacted again and informed of the outcome.

12. Whether or not the person was away long enough for some or all of the people/agencies above to have been contacted, the staff member in charge (along with the parent or carer if present) should check the person for any sign of physical injury and try to find out whether they feel they have been subject to any form of abuse, and take action, as appropriate. The person in charge should assess whether the person requires first aid, such as treatment for shock, and should observe them frequently for signs of harm.

13. The person in charge should complete the relevant Incident Report Form without delay, and in all cases, within 24 hours.

### ***Procedure after a missing service user is found***

1. The Board of Trustees must be informed about any missing service user incident as soon as possible after the person has been found or as soon as there is an opportunity prior to the person being found if they are missing for a long period.
2. The relevant Projects Manager or Chief Executive should investigate the incident and update the risk assessment relating to that service or activity, if necessary. This must happen within two weeks of the incident.
3. The Chief Executive is responsible for chairing a review meeting which should include all relevant staff / volunteers. The purpose of the meeting is to identify lessons learnt, and review procedures and activities to ensure that, as far as possible, similar incidents do not occur in future.

4. The outcomes of the meeting should be written up with a clear action plan agreed that sets out changes required to procedures and practices and a timescale for implementing the action plan.
  5. The Chief Executive will write to the parent or responsible carer with details of the incident, the findings of the subsequent investigation and the action plan.
  6. The relevant Projects Manager or Chief Executive may advise other parties of the incident, as required, such as the relevant social services department, if the service user was referred to the activity by social services.
  7. Disciplinary action may be considered if any staff member is found to have not followed procedures or risk assessments; or is believed to have behaved in a manner such that a service use was been placed at undue risk.
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## 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