

# Runaways and Unaccounted for Children

## Policy Statement

The YMCA has comprehensive policies and procedures that are implemented by all staff to minimise the risk of a child being unaccounted for within a service or program. In circumstances where a child is deemed missing, the following policy outlines clear procedures to be taken to ensure that the child is located as soon as possible.

### Related Policies to be read in conjunction with this policy:

- Critical Incident Policy & Procedure
- Incident, Injury, and Illness Reporting procedures
- Incident, Injury, Illness and Trauma Policy & Procedure

### Objectives:

- To provide clear steps for staff to follow in the event that a child is deemed missing from a program or service
- To provide clear steps for staff to follow in the event that a child is not collected from a service

### Procedures:

- Missing Child,
- Runaways observed by staff
- Uncollected children

### Missing Child:

If a child is unaccounted for, deemed missing from the group, or has run away from the group, the following steps must be taken to try and locate the child:

- Most senior employee present at the time is to appoint a staff person, (more than one if able), to conduct a search of the immediate program area, including inside and outside areas of the facility. If on excursion, the local area and/or facility to be searched.
- Simultaneously a roll call must be undertaken to ensure all other children are accounted for. Children are to be re-grouped if necessary to accommodate reduced staffing level and should be relocated to an inside area or defined external area if inside is not possible. This is to ensure children can be supervised closely to minimise risk of any further children becoming unaccounted for.
- Senior employee is to call, or delegate another staff person to call Children's Services Headquarters to inform them of the situation.
- Children's Services Headquarters employee who takes the call is to notify relevant senior staff and managers immediately. The OSHC Manager and/or CS Executive Manager must be notified by phone if they are not in the office.
- If within a school facility, seek assistance to look for the child from any school staff that may be still in the facility.
- If child has not been located in the local area, a wider search should be undertaken by a designated staff person. This person should take a mobile phone in order to report back any developments regarding the search.
- The Manager/ Executive Manager should, at this stage, inform CEO if the situation

## YMCA CANBERRA – RUNAWAYS AND UNACCOUNTED FOR CHILDREN

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NR03	Children Services Executive Manager	Internal	01/01/2014	07/09/2023	Approved

- At the same time as a wider search is initiated the parents of the missing child should be informed. The parents must be told that an initial search of the local area has failed to locate their child, that you are continuing to look for the child, but at this stage, you are required to inform the police.
- The parents may be able to offer suggestions as to where the search could be directed, for example they may have gone to a relative or friend's house nearby.
- If parents can't be contacted, all other contacts identified on enrolment form are to be tried.
- Police to be informed of missing child, and staff to follow advice from police.
- Senior employee on site and other employees are to try and record or note times of steps taken during the whole procedure including last known time the child was seen.
- Parents collecting children from the program can be informed of the incident and that staff are following procedure in trying to locate the child. There is no need to give any further information.
- When all of the above steps have been taken, and as soon as possible after the incident, staff must be debriefed and offered counselling. A full and detailed incident report must be completed, by all employees involved in the incident, as soon as possible and logged online via the incident reporting system no later than 24hours after the incident.
- Any media requests for comment must be referred directly to the CEO of the YMCA of Canberra.
- Follow up may include reviewing guidelines for the supervision of children, and reporting back to the families and school community.

#### **Runaway that has been observed by staff member:**

In instances where a child decides to leave the service of their own accord and this is witnessed by a staff member the following steps should be followed;

- Every effort should be made to talk the child into remaining within the boundaries of the service
- A second staff member needs to be made aware of the situation so that assistance can be provided. This may mean sending a child with a message to another staff member so that staff member can maintain a visual of the child.
- If all efforts to maintain the child within the boundaries of the service fail a staff member should tail the child. This staff member must take a mobile phone with them
- The parents of the child should be contacted to inform them of the situation. If not available other contacts as listed on the enrolment form should be tried.
- Children's Services Headquarters should be informed of the situation as soon as practicable. Any employee who takes this call will inform all relevant senior staff & managers in the office. The OSHC Manager or CS Executive manager should be notified by phone if they are not in the office.
- The tailing staff member should report back to the senior employee regularly; physical restraint of the child should be avoided unless they are in imminent danger e.g. Stepping onto road with traffic

#### **Uncollected Children:**

- Children must be collected from all services before the stated closing time of the service. A fee of \$5 per child per minute past closing time will be charged for the late collection of children
- If a child has not been collected 30 minutes after closing time and all listed contacts have been tried, the staff will contact the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support - Care and Protection Services.

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### **Related policies:**

- Excursions
- Child Health and Wellbeing
- Fees
- Safeguarding Children and Young people

### **Standards/Legislation:**

- Education and Care Services National Regulations, December 2011

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