9 Early Years practice procedures

9.2 Attendance and Absence

We take steps to ensure that children are kept safe, that their wellbeing is promoted, and they do not miss out on their entitlements and opportunities. At the very least, good attendance promotes good outcomes for children. In a small minority of cases, good attendance may also lead to early identification of more serious concerns for a child or family.

There are several reasons why a child may be absent from a setting. In most cases it is reasonable to expect that parents/carers alert the setting as soon as possible, or in the case of appointments and holidays give adequate notice. The attendance and absence policy are shared with parents and carers, and they are advised that they should contact the setting within one hour of the time the child would have been expected to advise of their absence. Designated safeguarding leads must also adhere to Local Safeguarding Partnership (LSP) requirements, procedures and contact protocols for children who are absent or missing from the provision.

- If a child who normally attends fails to arrive and no contact has been received from their parents/carers, or if the child is absent for a prolonged period of time the designated safeguarding lead, takes immediate action to contact them to seek an explanation for the absence and be assured that the child is safe and well.
- If no contact is made with the parents and there is no means to verify the reason for the child's absence i.e. through a named contact on the child's registration form, this is recorded as an unexplained absence on the child's personal file and is followed up each session the child is due to attend is made.
- If contact has not been made, and we have any reason for concern about a child's wellbeing and welfare, children's services will be contacted for advice about making a referral. Other relevant services may be contacted as per LSP procedures.
- All absences are recorded on the child's personal file with the reason given for the absence, the expected duration and any follow up action taken or required with timescales.
- Absence records will be monitored to identify patterns and trends in children's attendance. An understanding of the child's and family's individual circumstances will inform the setting's judgement in determining what constitutes a 'prolonged period of absence'.
- Absence records are retained for at least three years, or until the next Ofsted inspection following a cohort of children moving on to school.

If at any time further information comes to light that gives cause for concern, procedure 6.1 Responding to safeguarding or child protection concerns is immediately followed.

Safeguarding vulnerable children

- The designated safeguarding lead or key person attempts to contact the parents to establish why the child is absent. If contact is made and a valid reason given, the information is recorded.
- Any relevant professionals involved with the child are informed, e.g. social worker/family support worker.
- If contact is made and the designated safeguarding lead is concerned that the child is at risk, the relevant professionals are contacted immediately. The events, conversation and follow-up actions are recorded. If contact cannot be made, the designated safeguarding lead contacts the relevant professionals and informs them of the situation.
- If the child has current involvement with social care, the social worker is notified on the day of the unexplained absence.

- If at any time information comes to light that gives cause for concern, 6 Safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults procedures are followed immediately.

Safeguarding

- If a child misses sessions and it has not been possible to make contact, the designated safeguarding lead will contact children's service and will make a referral if advised. Contact with Social Care may be made sooner if there are concerns for a child's wellbeing or welfare.
- If there is any cause for concern i.e. the child has a child protection plan in place or there have been previous safeguarding and welfare concerns, the designated safeguarding lead attempts to contact the child's parent/carer immediately. If no contact is made, the child's absence is logged on 6.1b Safeguarding incident reporting form or CPOMs, and Social Care are contacted immediately, and safeguarding procedures are followed.

Poor/irregular attendance

Whilst attendance at an early years setting is not mandatory, regular poor attendance may be indicative of safeguarding and welfare concerns that should be followed up.

- In the first instance the key work and / or manager should discuss a child's attendance with their parents to ascertain any potential barriers i.e. transport, working pattern, changes in circumstances etc and should work with the parent/s to offer support where possible.
- If poor attendance continues and strategies to support are not having an impact, the keyworker and setting manager must review the situation and decide if a referral to a multi-agency team is appropriate.
- Where there are already safeguarding and welfare concerns about a child or a child protection plan is in place, poor/irregular attendance at the setting is reported to the Social Care worker without delay.

Funding

In the case of children receiving funding, the funding agreement states claims can only be made for hours a child is regularly attending. Short absences and holidays are not required to be deducted.

Where absence is recurring or for extended periods or no contact is made with parents / carers the setting is required to make the local authority aware. In accordance with the Parent / Carer Funding Declaration, the local authority may withdraw funding. In the event funding is withdrawn parents / carers will become liable for fees in accordance with the contract terms and conditions.

If absences persist and / or there continues to be no contact with parents or carers, it will be considered that parents / carers have withdrawn their child and terminated their child's attendance and contract with Acorn Pre-School & The . In accordance with this the relevant termination conditions within the parent/ carer contract will be followed.