

Guidance for promoting good attendance and responding to unexpected absences.

Good attendance supports children's learning and development, promotes their wellbeing, and ensures families do not miss out on their entitlements. This is why recording attendance is included in the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Although attendance at an early years setting is non-statutory, good attendance practice promotes good outcomes for all children, but in particular for those children who may have some vulnerabilities such as 2YO funded children, EYPP children and those for whom you have safeguarding concerns. In a small minority of cases, good attendance practice may also lead to the earlier identification of more serious concerns for a child or family and may play a vital part in keeping a child or other family members safe from harm.

There are many positive benefits for young children to be gained from regular attendance at their pre-school, nursery, or childminder, so it is important that all staff understand why good attendance by children is encouraged, and that you promote this with parents.

Some of the benefits include;

- Building the idea that getting up and going to pre-school is part of the weekly routine, which will support transitions into school.
- Children who attend regularly develop a feel for the rhythm of the week and gain a sense of security from the routine.
- Young children find it easier to build and sustain a range of social relationships when they regularly attend their childcare setting.
- For some families, particularly at times of stress, the child's regular attendance at the setting allows parents to get other things done, which then helps them enjoy spending time with the child when they are at home.
- Good attendance at the setting helps children feel good about themselves. This is because they know what goes on and what to expect, feel more

confident with the adults and the other children and have more opportunities to be valued and praised for their own special contribution.

- Children who attend regularly are more likely to be able to separate positively from their parents which helps them to see themselves as confident and able.
- Regular attendance helps staff at the setting to build upon their interests and plan future opportunities to help the child develop.

In order to promote good attendance do you:

- Consistently and thoroughly investigate all absences for individual children and keep good records of the family's explanations?
- Keep full registration details for every child, as specified in the EYFS?
- Ensure attendance is routinely monitored the by committee or the owner?
- Share the benefits of good attendance with staff by including this in inductions?
- Make sure staff understand that absence from the setting is a potential safeguarding risk and understand their role in keeping children safe?
- Develop good relationships with the family, making sure you are aware of any additional factors (e.g., EAL, learning difficulties) to ensure that appropriate means of communication are always used?
- Ensure all staff are welcoming?
- Promote the benefits of good attendance to parents by including information in your welcome packs/sessions/website/newsletters?
- Take into consideration any additional factors that may affect attendance, for example the child/family's health needs, culture, family situation and put in place plans to reduce the impact of any absences?
- Have an unexpected absence policy in place?

The importance of following up unexpected absences was tragically highlighted in 2016, when Chadrack Mbala Mulo, a 4-year-old boy with additional needs was found dead with his arms around the body of his mother who had died following a seizure.

The serious case review that followed (2017) recommended that:

Parents / carers are given the opportunity to disclose any information about themselves (health or otherwise) that might be relevant to the care of their child and/or relevant when responding to an emergency. This should take place when a child is registered in any education setting and as part of annual updates to records. The arrangements for the safe storage of such information should be robust and clearly explained to parents / carers.

Had the school been aware of the mother's health needs, this would have changed the way they responded to the child's absence.

Other recommendations included that settings should hold the details of 3 Emergency contacts (The EYFS requires a minimum of 2)

Guidance for developing an unexpected absence /attendance policy

You might find it useful to consider the following when developing a written non-attendance policy which can be shared with your parents/carers:

- Do you ask parents/carers to tell you if their child is going to be absent and provide a reason?
- Do you expect parents/carers to call you by a certain time on the first day their child is absent?
- Do you expect parents/carers to speak to you or do you accept a text, or email?
- How long do you wait on the first day of absence before contacting the parent if the parent has not contacted you?
- Who is responsible for contacting the parent – leader/manager, key person? - Do you record this information?
- Do you call a parent and speak to them personally or do you send a text or email?
- What do you do if there is no reply when you contact the parent, and the child does not arrive at your setting the next day?
- If you are concerned about the welfare of the child do you follow your safeguarding procedures?
- Do you consider patterns and trends in a child's absences, and their personal circumstances in order to make a professional judgement in deciding if the child's absence should be considered as prolonged?
- Do you follow up any non-contacts by calling emergency contacts detailed on the child's registration form?

- Do you have a minimum of 3 emergency contacts which are regularly reviewed with parents/carers?
- Do you give parents / carers the opportunity to disclose any information about themselves (health or otherwise) that might be relevant to the care of their child and/or relevant when responding to an emergency?
- Do you give consideration to the child's vulnerability, parents and /or carer's vulnerability and their home life in your decision making?
- If contact cannot be established, do you have a process to establish whether the absence should be shared with other agencies, such as Children's Services/ the police?
- Where children are on child protection plans, or in the process of a referral, do you report all absences to Children's Services?
- Do you ask parents/carers to tell you about any planned holidays in advance?
- Do you keep a record of the discussions and actions you have taken when following up nonattendance to demonstrate what steps you have taken to make sure that the parents/carers are aware of their entitlement and the attendance requirements at your setting?
- Do you tell parents/carers whether or not they have to pay fees when their child is absent? This information should be included in your parental contract or terms and conditions.
- Do you charge parents/carers if your setting closes due to unforeseen circumstances, such as a power failure, or heavy snow? This information should be included in your emergency closure policy.
- Do you charge parents/carers if you are open during poor weather conditions and they are unable to bring their child to your setting? Is this information in your emergency closure policy?
- If you provide a before or after school club and a child who is in does not show up, what do you do? Do you contact the school/class teacher and the parents/carers? You should never take the word of other children that the child did not attend school.