The Millennium Farm Trust

GN7 POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR MISSING PERSONS V04

Next review date: August 2027

Version Control

Version number	Date of changes	Who	Review summary
02	28/04/2021	T Freathy	Scheduled review
02	April 2024	T Freathy	Scheduled review no changes
03	Sept 2025	T Freathy	Additional section covering school age children added.
03	March 2026	T Freathy	Scheduled review. Changed language and procedures to reflect best practice.
04	Aug 2026	T Freathy	Review following publication of KCSiE 2026

Section1 Missing Adults

1. Policy Statement

Millennium Farm Trust is committed to a person-centred approach to service delivery, and recognises that many people who use our services are able to go about their daily lives very independently while others may need varying levels of support and/or supervision. In accordance with this, each person will be afforded dignity and respect by recognising their individuality, their personal abilities and their support and supervision requirements within the day or residential service and the wider community. The risk of an individual going missing is considered on an individual basis as part of the person's support planning process. Where an individual is identified as being at increased risk of going missing, their risk assessment and support plan will identify relevant vulnerabilities, known triggers, likely destinations, communication needs and actions to be taken should they go missing. Where appropriate, an individual Missing Person Response Plan will be developed.

2. Policy Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out the procedure to be taken if someone is suspected and/or confirmed to be missing or absent without explanation while being supported by Millennium Farm Trust at Depden Care Farm. The policy does not address supervision levels or prevention strategies as these are decided on an individual basis in response to the

person's needs and wishes and as part of their individual support plan.

A missing person incident will always be considered from a safeguarding perspective and the response will reflect the individual's known needs, vulnerabilities and circumstances.

3. Policy Scope

This policy applies to all staff employed by Millennium Farm Trust, including those contracted for services, sessional workers, volunteers, visitors, the people who use our supports and their families/carers.

4 Core principle underpinning the Policy

4.1 The balancing of rights and risk

- Each person's right to independence and freedom of movement both within and outside of the day or residential service and the wider community is respected.
- Any restriction on an individual's freedom of movement must have a lawful basis and be necessary and proportionate to the identified risk. The least restrictive available option should always be used.
- Staff are responsible for promoting an active and flexible approach to managing potential dangers in order to minimise restrictions and promote independence.
- Staff should support people to be as independent as possible based on their individual support and supervision requirements and personal wishes
- An assessment of risk should be carried out if it is suspected that a person is at risk of going missing (Please see Personal Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan).
- Staff should develop strategies to reduce the impact of any identified risk and complete a risk management plan (Please see 'Positive Risk Assessment – Appendix 1).
- If a person is subject to a restriction based on the level of risk being unacceptable, the reason must be documented, including any assessment used to determine the use of restrictive options.
- Staff must act in accordance with Millennium Farm Trust's 'Policy and Guidelines on Challenging behaviours and the Prevention of or use of Restrictive Interventions'
- Documentation of the restriction must include evidence of all strategies considered and tried in attempting to reduce or manage the risks
- All necessary documentation should be kept on file and submitted to Director and/or Trustees as part of the usual risk policy and practice review procedures.

Adults must not be assumed to lack capacity simply because they make a decision that others consider unwise. Where there is reason to doubt an individual's capacity to make a particular decision relating to leaving the Farm or their own safety, staff must act in accordance with the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the Millennium Farm Trust's relevant policies and procedures. Any restriction imposed must be necessary, proportionate and the least restrictive available option.

5 Definition of a 'Missing Person'

A person will be considered missing where their whereabouts cannot be established and the circumstances are out of character, give rise to concern for their safety or welfare, or are inconsistent with their agreed support arrangements. The response will be proportionate to the individual's circumstances, capacity, known vulnerabilities and level of risk.

6. Procedure

6.1 Confirming if a person is missing

Staff must take the following steps to confirm whether the person is missing

6.1.1 A person goes missing from our service

- Check the person's support plan, office diary or other relevant sources to see if the person is at a prearranged meeting or appointment.
- Ask other people at the farm whether the person has told anyone where they were going.
- If there is no record of this information inform the Director or their deputy, who then becomes the coordinator of the search.
- Inform all persons in the immediate vicinity.
- Check entrances, exits and the immediate vicinity and establish, where possible, whether and in which direction the person may have left the Farm.
- A full search of the buildings and grounds should be organised immediately

The immediate response must not compromise the safety or appropriate supervision of other Farm Helpers.

6.1.2 A person goes missing on an outing

If a person goes missing during an outing or off-site activity:

- establish when and where they were last seen;
- search the immediate vicinity where safe and appropriate;
- notify the Person in Charge at Depden Care Farm;
- consider the individual's known vulnerabilities and risk assessment;
- contact the Police without delay where the circumstances indicate significant risk;
- inform the individual's family/carer/representative as appropriate; and
- ensure sufficient staff remain responsible for the safety and supervision of the rest of the group.

Staff must not compromise the safety of other Farm Helpers by conducting an extended search.

6.1.3 A Person does not arrive to the farm

- Contact the person's place of residence to enquire as to their whereabouts
- If no response, contact their usual mode of transport (if known) to find out if the person was picked up or dropped off

Where the person's whereabouts cannot be established, staff must consider whether the unexplained absence raises a safeguarding concern. Particular consideration should be given to whether the absence is unusual, whether the person was known to have left home, and their

individual vulnerabilities. Concerns should be escalated immediately to the Person in Charge/DSL as appropriate and to the Police or relevant safeguarding authority where necessary.

6.1.4 Concerns following departure from Depden Care Farm

- All farm helpers must be picked up by a known person or organisation. If a driver is new to staff, staff must satisfy themselves by questioning, that the transport is bona fide. (Do they know the person's name they are collecting; do they know where they are going to?). Collection arrangements should be agreed/documented in advance where reasonably possible.

- If necessary, contact their usual mode of transport to find out who is picking the person up.

If the person was picked up from Depden Care Farm but failed to be returned to their residence and the missed person is not found and no explanation is forthcoming then the person is confirmed as 'missing'.

NB: The length of time between a person 'being missed' and being confirmed as a 'missing person' should be decided on an individual basis. For example if the missed person is known to be at increased risk of harm if unsupervised then they should be confirmed as missing immediately. Staff should seek guidance from their manager with respect to this and if in doubt should always confirm the person as missing sooner rather than later.

6.2 If a person is confirmed as missing

- The Director or Person in Charge becomes the Missing Person Coordinator and will undertake an immediate dynamic risk assessment.
- The response must take account of the individual's known vulnerabilities, capacity, communication needs, medical needs, weather and environmental conditions, length of time missing and the circumstances in which they disappeared.
- A search of the Farm and immediate vicinity should be undertaken where appropriate. Sufficient staff must remain available to ensure the safety and appropriate supervision of other Farm Helpers.
- The Police should be contacted without delay where the circumstances indicate that the individual may be at significant risk. Staff must not delay contacting the Police simply in order to complete an extended search.
- Where there is an immediate risk to life or serious harm, staff must call 999. In other circumstances where Police assistance is required, staff should use the appropriate non-emergency route.

6.3 Reporting and informing

The Director/DSL should consider whether the circumstances constitute a safeguarding concern requiring referral or notification to the relevant Local Authority safeguarding service, commissioner, social worker or other professional. A contemporaneous record should be maintained of actions taken, searches undertaken, contacts made, information received and significant decisions, including the reasons for those decisions.

- The Manager (Search Coordinator) must inform the missing person's family/guardian/next of kin and keep them updated.

- The staff member responsible for the person at the time they went missing must complete an incident report.

- Any unexplained absence of a person from the farm is a notifiable event and must be reported to the Chairman by phone as soon as possible and an incident report made to the next available Trustees meeting.

6.4 When the person is found

The person should be welcomed back calmly and sensitively. The immediate priority should be their physical and emotional wellbeing rather than blame or criticism. Where appropriate, the person should be given an opportunity to explain what happened and why they left. Their communication needs and capacity should be taken into account and appropriate support provided to enable them to express their views.

- The Search Coordinator should be informed immediately

- The Search Coordinator must then inform:
    - All members of the search party
    - The person's family/guardian/next of kin
    - The Police, if the person was not found by them
    - All relevant staff

- The person should be medically assessed by a medical practitioner if necessary.

- If further medical referral or transfer to hospital is indicated this should be arranged and the person's family/guardian/next of kin informed.

- An Incident report should be completed

- Debriefing involving all relevant staff, the person and their family if indicated should occur as soon as possible after the event

- A full review of the incident should be conducted in consultation with the person and their family if indicated.

- Any contributing factors should be addressed and the risk management plan developed.

- Where the person is considered to remain at increased risk of going missing, their individual risk assessment and support plan must be reviewed and, where appropriate, an individual Missing Person Response Plan developed or updated.

Section 2 – Missing Children and Young People of Statutory School Age

1. Policy Statement

Depden Care Farm recognises its duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people who attend its programmes.

Children attending Depden Care Farm may have additional needs or vulnerabilities which mean that an unexplained absence, failure to arrive, or going missing while attending the Farm may present a significant safeguarding risk.

Depden Care Farm will therefore respond promptly to any situation in which a child cannot be accounted for. Our response will be proportionate to the individual child, their known needs and vulnerabilities, and the circumstances of the absence.

Depden Care Farm works in partnership with parents/carers, schools and other education providers, social workers, Local Authorities and other agencies as appropriate. Information about absence or a missing child will be shared promptly where this is necessary to safeguard the child.

This section should be read alongside Section 1 of this policy and the Millennium Farm Trust Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

2. Scope and Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, three different circumstances are recognised:

2.1 A child who goes missing while attending Depden Care Farm

A child is considered missing when they are absent from the place where they ought reasonably to be, their whereabouts are unknown and staff are unable to account for them.

2.2 A child who fails to arrive at Depden Care Farm

This occurs when a child who is expected to attend a scheduled placement does not arrive and no satisfactory explanation for their absence has been received.

2.3 A Child Missing Education (CME)

A Child Missing Education is a child of compulsory school age who is not registered at a school and is not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school.

A child who fails to attend Depden Care Farm on a particular day is not, for that reason alone, a Child Missing Education. However, unexplained or repeated absence may be an indicator of wider safeguarding or education concerns and should be shared with the child's school, education provider and/or Local Authority as appropriate.

3. Individual Risk Assessment and Planning

The risk of a child going missing will be considered as part of their individual risk assessment and support planning.

Where there is a known or identified risk of a child going missing, consideration should be given to developing an individual Missing Person Response Plan. This should contain information that would assist staff and, where necessary, the Police in responding quickly and safely.

This may include:

- a recent photograph and physical description;
- communication needs and the best way of approaching or communicating with the child;
- relevant SEND or additional needs;
- medical needs;
- known triggers or circumstances which may cause the child to leave;
- places they may be likely to go;
- particular risks or vulnerabilities;
- strategies known to help the child return safely;
- parent/carer contact details; and
- relevant school, social worker and professional contact details.

Information should be proportionate to the identified risk and kept up to date.

4. A Child Who Fails to Arrive at Depden Care Farm

4.1 First Day Response

If a child fails to attend Depden Care Farm when expected and no prior explanation has been received, staff must take reasonable steps on the same day to establish the reason for the absence and satisfy themselves that the child's whereabouts are known.

This should normally include:

- checking the attendance register, Farm diary and any messages received;
- contacting the child's parent/carer;
- checking alternative/emergency contacts where appropriate;
- checking with the child's transport provider where transport arrangements may be relevant; and
- contacting the child's school, education provider or other referring organisation where appropriate.

The purpose of this contact is not simply to establish an attendance reason. Staff should consider whether the unexplained absence gives rise to any concern about the child's welfare or safety.

4.2 Where the Child Cannot Be Accounted For

If reasonable enquiries do not establish the child's whereabouts, or information received gives rise to concern about their welfare, the matter must be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Deputy DSL.

The DSL will consider the child's individual circumstances and known vulnerabilities and determine what further action is required. This may include contact with:

- the child's school or education provider;
- parent/carer or other family members;

- the child's social worker or Early Help practitioner;
- the relevant Local Authority safeguarding service; and/or
- the Police.

Where there is reason to believe that the child may be in immediate danger or at risk of serious harm, the Police must be contacted without delay.

Safeguarding concerns must not be allowed to wait for a particular period of absence before action is taken.

5. A Child Who Goes Missing While at Depden Care Farm

If a child cannot be located while attending Depden Care Farm, staff must treat this as a safeguarding incident and respond immediately.

5.1 Immediate Action

The member of staff identifying that the child is missing must immediately notify the Person in Charge and the DSL or Deputy DSL.

The Person in Charge will coordinate the immediate response and ensure that:

- the child's individual support plan, risk assessment and any Missing Person Response Plan are checked;
- staff establish when and where the child was last seen;
- other staff and Farm Helpers are asked whether they have relevant information;
- buildings, grounds and other likely locations are searched promptly;
- entrances and exits are checked;
- sufficient staff remain to ensure the safety and appropriate supervision of all other Farm Helpers and children;
- the child's parent/carer is informed; and
- an accurate record of actions and times is maintained.

Search activity must be proportionate to the circumstances and must not place staff, volunteers, other Farm Helpers or children at risk.

5.2 Contacting the Police

The decision to contact the Police must be based upon the circumstances and level of risk and should not be delayed simply to allow staff to complete an extended search.

In determining the level of risk, particular consideration should be given to:

- the child's age and level of understanding;
- SEND, learning disability or communication difficulties;
- physical or medical needs;
- emotional wellbeing or known risk of self-harm;

- previous incidents of going missing;
- known risks of abuse, neglect or exploitation;
- risk of criminal or sexual exploitation;
- known unsafe locations or people;
- weather, darkness, roads, water, animals or other environmental hazards; and
- any other information contained within the child's individual risk assessment.

Where there is an immediate risk to life or serious harm, staff must call **999**.

In other circumstances where Police assistance is required, staff should contact the Police through the appropriate non-emergency route.

When contacting the Police, staff should be prepared to provide all relevant information about the child, including their description, photograph where available, vulnerabilities, communication needs, likely locations and the circumstances in which they went missing.

Staff will cooperate fully with Police instructions. Once the Police assume responsibility for coordinating the search, staff should follow their directions.

6. Missing During an Off-Site Activity

If a child goes missing during an outing or other activity away from Depden Care Farm:

- staff must immediately establish when and where the child was last seen;
- the immediate vicinity should be searched where it is safe and appropriate to do so;
- the Person in Charge and DSL/Deputy DSL must be informed;
- the child's individual risk assessment and vulnerabilities must be considered;
- the Police should be contacted without delay where the circumstances indicate significant risk;
- the child's parent/carer must be informed; and
- the child's school or referring organisation should be informed as appropriate.

At least one member of staff must remain responsible for the safety and supervision of the other children and Farm Helpers. Staff must not compromise the safety of the wider group in attempting to locate the missing child.

7. When the Child is Found or Returns

When a missing child is found or returns:

- the Person in Charge and DSL/Deputy DSL must be informed immediately;
- the Police must be informed if they have been involved;
- the child's parent/carer must be informed;
- other staff or agencies involved in the search must be informed;
- the child's immediate physical and emotional wellbeing should be assessed and medical assistance sought where necessary; and

- the child's school, social worker, Local Authority or other relevant professional should be informed as appropriate.

The child should be welcomed back calmly and sensitively. The immediate priority is their safety and wellbeing rather than blame or disciplinary action.

Where appropriate, the child should be given an opportunity to explain what happened, why they left or where they went. Their communication needs and level of understanding should be taken into account.

Information obtained following the child's return should be considered as part of the safeguarding assessment and used to identify whether any further action is required.

8. Recording, Reporting and Review

All incidents involving a child going missing, and any unexplained absence which raises a safeguarding concern, must be recorded.

Records should include:

- when the concern was first identified;
- when and where the child was last known to be present;
- actions taken and searches undertaken;
- people and agencies contacted and the time of contact;
- information received;
- decisions made and the reasons for those decisions;
- when and where the child was found or returned; and
- any subsequent safeguarding action.

An incident report must be completed in accordance with Millennium Farm Trust procedures.

Following a missing-person incident, the DSL and relevant staff should review the circumstances of the incident with the child, their parent/carer and relevant professionals where appropriate.

The review should consider:

- why the incident occurred;
- whether there were any warning signs or contributing factors;
- whether existing supervision and risk-management arrangements remain appropriate;
- what can be learned from the incident;
- whether the child's risk assessment, support plan or Missing Person Response Plan requires amendment; and
- whether a safeguarding referral or further multi-agency action is required.

Repeated incidents must result in a review of the child's individual risk assessment and support arrangements.

9. Repeated or Unexplained Absence and Children Missing Education

Patterns of repeated, prolonged or unexplained absence must be treated as a potential safeguarding concern rather than solely an attendance matter.

Staff must report concerns about patterns of absence to the DSL/Deputy DSL.

The DSL will liaise with the child's school, education provider, parent/carer and other professionals as appropriate to establish whether there are wider concerns about the child's welfare, education or placement.

Where there is concern that a child may not be receiving suitable education, the DSL will liaise with the relevant Local Authority and cooperate with any Child Missing Education procedures.

Safeguarding concerns will be escalated immediately where necessary and will not be subject to a minimum period or number of days of absence.

10. Responsibilities

All staff and volunteers are responsible for:

- remaining alert to unexplained absence or a child going missing;
- reporting concerns immediately;
- following this procedure and any individual Missing Person Response Plan; and
- accurately recording relevant information.

The DSL/Deputy DSL is responsible for:

- assessing safeguarding concerns;
- coordinating or supporting the response to missing children;
- liaising with parents/carers, schools, social workers, Local Authorities, Police and other agencies as appropriate;
- ensuring appropriate safeguarding referrals are made;
- ensuring incidents and patterns of absence are reviewed; and
- ensuring relevant individual plans and risk assessments are updated.

The Board of Trustees is responsible for ensuring appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place and that this policy is reviewed regularly.

11. Linked Policies and Guidance

This policy should be read alongside:

- Millennium Farm Trust Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- Millennium Farm Trust Risk Assessment and Risk Management procedures;
- individual support plans and risk assessments;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026;
- Children Missing Education – statutory guidance for local authorities and schools;

- Working Together to Improve School Attendance;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children; and
- relevant Suffolk County Council Children Missing Education and safeguarding procedures.