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## **FAQ: Keeping Children Safe Response**

### **Children Leaving Licensed Care Programs Undetected**

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**Q:** Why has this been identified as a trend?

**A:** There have been nine separate instances in which one or more children were found unaccompanied, unsupervised and, most often, undetected.

**Q:** Did the caregivers notice the children were missing?

**A:** In many of the cases, the children were not missed by their caregivers.

**Q:** Is this happening primarily in lower quality programs?

**A:** No. Many of the agencies where these incidents are occurring have a 3 Star Rating.

**Q:** Are these older children who are trying to run away or escape supervision?

**A:** No. These children are between the ages of one and four years old.

**Q:** Are these incidents happening primarily in one region of the state?

**A:** No. They have occurred throughout the state, almost equally among the east, middle and west grand divisions.

**Q:** Are these incidents occurring primarily in one type of care environment?

**A:** No. They have occurred almost evenly in group homes and centers.

**Q:** **What can I do to prevent this from happening in my program?**

**A:** Here are some steps you can take:

1. Ensure that the first priority for every caregiver is that they know the whereabouts and status of each child in their care at all times. Nothing is more important. Create routines and policies that support this priority. A high quality environment can never substitute for an absence of caregiver interaction with children. Intentionally engaging children in purposeful play and discovery

learning opportunities will keep them happy, busy and learning, and --- importantly --- in the program. Talk to caregivers about the importance of taking a head count regularly and comparing it to the daily attendance sheet.

2. Review the sign in and sign out policies and procedure and ensure that all staff and parents are aware of them and understand the potential consequences of not following them.

3. Review your agency's policies and procedures related to releasing children and ensure that all staff and parents are aware of them and understand the potential consequences of not following them.

4. Observe children being dropped off and picked up on a normal day and note any environmental or procedural issues that could contribute to a child leaving the agency undetected.

5. Observe children and staff from the time they begin to prepare to go out onto the playground until they return inside. Who conducts the playground check? Does this person also check the security of any gates? Are there any openings in fences? Are children always visible to a caregiver while on the playground? Is there a path children travel on the way to the playground? What procedure is in place to ensure that all children arrive at the destination? Where are the teachers positioned? Note any environmental or procedural issues that could contribute to a child leaving the agency undetected.

6. Closely inspect all entrances and exits, including doors, windows and gates on the premises, including those on the playground. Determine if the locking and latching mechanisms are in good order and whether children can readily leave without assistance. It may work for your program to install alarms on classroom doors to alert caregivers in the event that a door is opened. These can be purchased for as little as \$10.

7. Think like a child. Think in terms of a small child who may be wandering, exploring his/her environment looking for something different, as is developmentally appropriate.

8. Know your children. Ensure all caregivers have a heightened awareness of children's individual tendencies, needs and personalities. Be alert to changes in a child's normal behavior or demeanor.

9. Ensure that all caregivers are aware of the potential costs of failing to maintain adequate supervision of each child at all times, as required by Child Care Licensing Rules.