

Searching Children and their Belongings



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1. Searching

It may be appropriate to conduct a search of a child or a child's belongings if there is reasonable cause to believe that the child has concealed weapons, illegal drugs other items which may place the child or others at risk of injury.

1.1 Searches With Co-operation

If there is a suspicion that such items are concealed, staff should try to obtain them with the child's co-operation.

Before conducting such a search, staff should consult their own supervisor/manager/on call officer (ERT if not available) and if appropriate the child's social worker. Two staff/carers should be present during the search, and the child should be present.

Only outer garments may be searched. More intimate searches may only be conducted by the Police or with the authorisation of the Court.

When conducting searches, reasonable precautions must be taken to protect against possible sharp or dangerous objects that may be concealed.

If weapons or any dangerous or offensive items are found, they must be confiscated and passed to the Manager.

1.2 Searches Without Co-operation

If the child does not co-operate, or is likely not to, a search may be undertaken without the child's co-operation or knowledge.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances (**see below**), the Manager and child's social worker must be consulted and come to a decision about the actions that may be taken. It may be appropriate to consult relevant Line Managers.

When coming to a decision on the actions that will be taken, the managers/social worker(s) must take account of the following:

- Two staff/carers must be present, and the child if possible.
- Only outer garments may be searched. More intimate searches may only be conducted by the Police or with the authorisation of the Court.
- When conducting searches, reasonable precautions must be taken to protect against possible sharp or dangerous objects that may be concealed.
- If weapons or any dangerous or offensive items are found, they must be confiscated and passed to the Manager/Supervising social worker or child's Social Worker.

Exceptional Circumstances

If there is an immediate risk of Injury or Damage to Property, staff/carers may what actions they deem to be appropriate to protect themselves or others. As a Last Resort, this can include the use of **Physical Intervention** in order to search a child, and the entering of a child's bedroom without their knowledge. However, staff/carers must only take such actions if it is safe to do so. If there is a risk that an offence may be committed, the Police must be called.

See the following Chapters:

Physical Interventions Procedure.

Contacting the Police Procedure.

2. Notifications

There are different notifications procedures for searches concluded with and without children's co-operation.

2.1 Searches Conducted With Children's Co-operation

Searches undertaken with the child's co-operation, where no force is used, must be notified to the manager and Social Worker at the first opportunity.

2.2 Searches Conducted Without Children's Co-operation

Searches conducted without the child's co-operation, or where a level of force has been used, are deemed to be Incidents and must be notified to the manager and Social Worker as soon as possible, but within 1 working day.

The social worker should inform the child's parent(s) if it is appropriate.

If the Incident results in any serious damage or the Police are called for assistance, a senior manager and others must be notified; See **Designated Manager (Serious/Malicious Damage)**.

3. Recording

There are different recording procedures for searches concluded with and without children's co-operation.

3.1 Searches Conducted With Children's Co-operation

Searches conducted with the child's co-operation should be recorded by the Social Worker in the child's file, by Foster Carers and Children's Home's staff in the child's Daily Record and by the supervising social worker in the Foster Carer's file. The details which must be included in the Detail Record, are:

- a. The time and date of the search
- b. The reason or suspicions which led to the need to conduct the search
- c. Who conducted the search and whether the child or others were present
- d. What was found, and whether items found were retained/confiscated
- e. If items were retained/confiscated, where they were stored

3.2 Searches Conducted Without Children's Co-operation

Searches conducted without the child's co-operation are deemed to be Incidents.

Please see **Incidents Guidance**, which summarises the records that must be completed and the undertaking of Management Reviews.