



LET'S TALK SAFETY

JUNE 2021



**HOW TO  
ENSURE YOUR  
OPERATION  
IS SAFE FOR  
SMALL  
CHILDREN**

As we all know, children love to play in amusement centres and soft play areas. Each time a parent or guardian brings their children to one of these facilities, they are placing an immense amount of trust into the operators. As operators, we automatically become responsible to ensure that safety and security are at the top of our priorities and that each and every child who visits our facilities can have lots of fun whilst always remaining safe.

It is down to the operator to implement adequate safety measures following both best practice and the outlined requirements of their local authorities, young children are brought to these operations to have fun and they do not yet have the right skills to assess risks, in addition their curious nature drives them to investigate and try to see/touch every possible corner or surface they possibly can.

It only takes a few seconds for a child to wander away when they are excited and have many different areas of activity near to them that they can enjoy. Children are by nature curious and until they realise their trusted parent or guardian is not near to them, they do not even realise they have become lost. In many instances

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young children will also struggle to explain who they are with, their parent/guardians name or contact number.

In this article we will be concentrating on Lost Children and how you can ensure you have implemented the best practices for your operation and your young guests.

You should start with having clear procedures on how to operate your play area, these are the rules, the do's and don'ts and the systems that your team needs to be trained on and to follow each and every day.

#### These Procedures Should As A Minimum Include:

- How to check the fence/boundary is safe and intact prior to opening.
- How to keep all surfaces clean and regularly wipe down throughout the day.
- How to regularly check that all parts of the play area are safe, no sharp edges, no tears or hazards can be seen/felt (this should be done regularly throughout each operating day).
- How to register each child and how to record details of the parent/guardian on a wristband (if you are using wrist bands).
- How to ensure no overcrowding.
- How to know what to look for in children's behaviour to be able to react if a small child is trying to get out.
- What policies to follow in the case of a missing child.

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The list above is just a highlight of how important it is that you the owner/operator clearly outline, document and train your team members on the best way to operate your facility and how to handle a case of a missing child if necessary.

You should also have a clearly written, easy to follow and regularly briefed policy on how to handle a case of a missing or lost child.



LOST  
CHILD?  
WHAT  
TO  
DO

### These Procedures Should As A Minimum Include:

- **Who to notify** if one of your young guests goes missing (management, security, police, parent/guardian, other).
- **Contact mechanism** and telephone numbers for emergencies
- How to ensure all other children in the play area are kept safe if the main attendant needs to leave in order to help find the missing child (e.g. who is to be called and how is this position covered while the attendant is away).
- **Any paperwork** that needs to be completed (incident form, other)
- **What to do in the case of finding a lost child** that is not from the play area but has wandered over to try and play (who to notify, how to keep them safe, who to hand them over to and who not to hand them over to).
- **What regulations** need to be followed by the local authority of your operation.



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Below are some measures we have outlined to give you a high-level overview of some measure you can implement in your play areas to help reduce the risk of lost children:



- 1. Entry and Exit Points:** Aim to have one single point of entry and exit with a staff member responsible for this area at all times. You must remember to ensure this point of entry meets the requirements for emergency evacuations.
- 2. Fencing/Boundaries:** A strong fence/boundary for areas where younger children congregate (e.g. soft play, ball pools, inflatables...) with the minimum height of around 1.2 meters or the height outlined by your local authorities around the play area is a great way to ensure young children do not find it too easy to wander away.
- 3. Clear Signage:** Aimed at the parent/guardian that tells them clearly how long their child can stay in the play area, what they need to do to collect their child and why it is mandatory for them to register and put their details on a wristband. This signage should be in all the languages required for the location of your operation.
- 4. Wristbands:** It is advisable to use an easy control mechanism such as wristbands, these are a great tool to use for recording the name of both the child and their parent/guardian as well as a contact telephone for their parent/guardian. In the event of a child wandering away or getting lost, the wrist band is the fastest way for the facility staff to know who the child is and how to find the people responsible for the child.
- 5. Registration System:** Either manual or electronic, you should always register each child that is brought to your operations to play, this way you have their full details and this is what you will need to ensure they are returned safely to the correct parent/guardian.
- 6. Supervision:** Not only is it important to ensure you have team members constantly on duty to supervise the children inside a play area, it is also advisable to install CCTV in order to give your operation a backup safety mechanism if any incidents occur.



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I am safe here !

- 7. Observe:** Your team must be trained to always observe the behaviour of the children in their care and know how to react to this. If a child is scared or adamant to come out of a play area, your employees must know how to keep the child calm and where they can take child to in order to keep them safe until their parent/guardian can be contacted to come and collect them.
- 8. Clear Exit Policy:** Have a clear policy on how each child is to be returned to their parent/guardian. Your team should be trained to know they need to cross check the registration system and some form of ID to ensure children are returned to the correct parent/guardian.
- 9. Training:** We've mentioned training a couple of times in the points above, a truly safe operations will have regular training on the operations processes, procedures and any electronic system which are in use (e.g. registration systems). This refresher training should be repeated regularly and the key points to follow shared with the operations team members each day in a "Daily Briefing".

Having fun should be easy and seamless, with the above recommendations we hope you are able to ensure your operation can offer endless fun to all your young guests all the time.

Our recommendations will help to guide you however it is important that you also follow all outlined recommendations of the manufacturers of your play area and those of your local authorities as well.

Once you have your procedures, policies and best practice operating systems in place, remember to continue training your teams and you will find that you have greatly reduced the risk of having a Lost Child Incident as a result.

*Article contributed by Mr. Pankaj Sharma, Health & Safety Manager, Landmark Leisure, Dubai.*

*The advice shared above is based on a high-level view of best practices when implementing Child Safety. It is however important that you speak with and follow the recommendations of the local authorities and regulations in the countries that you operate. Their guidelines will help you to create your own Operating Procedures, Staff Training Plan and documentation to ensure your Child Safety measures meet the requirements of your individual country, the regulations and recommendations of your local authorities.*