Lost-child procedures at events: briefing front-line staff

A lost-child briefing should explain how staff contact the designated safeguarding or event lead, where assistance is coordinated and how information is shared securely. Staff at gates, information points and activity areas need a consistent process. Give them the event location terms they will use in a report. Explain the controlled reunification procedure and who is authorised to verify a proposed handover.

UK venue staff introduction. Venue safeguarding procedures govern handover and police escalation.

The practical principles

Prepare before opening

Know the designated lost-child or safeguarding lead, the reporting channel and the agreed safe location. Staff need a shared procedure for both a missing-child report and a child found alone. Learn what information event control needs and how urgent risks are escalated. Report a missing child immediately under the plan; the response should reflect age, vulnerability, location and any immediate danger.

Support the child safely

Stay calm and use simple, reassuring language. Follow the safeguarding procedure for staff presence and the safe location. Keep the child supervised and avoid unnecessary movement. Ask only what is needed to help, such as their name and who they came with. Share identifying details through the controlled channel. Publicly broadcasting extensive details can make it easier for an unrelated person to claim the child.

Complete the handover

Refer a person claiming a child to the authorised lead. The lead should use the venue’s verification procedure, consider the child’s response and record the handover. A confident adult or matching surname alone is insufficient reassurance. Escalate any concern about the claimed relationship. If immediate danger exists, call 999. Document the times, staff involved and actions so the incident can be followed through.

Work through a shift scenario

Fictional exercise: a child approaches a volunteer saying they cannot find their parent. The volunteer reassures the child, contacts the designated lead and follows the event arrangements for safe support. An adult then arrives saying the child belongs with them. The volunteer uses the verification and authorised handover process instead of relying on confidence or familiarity. Immediate danger requires urgent assistance.

Avoid the common failure

Broadcasting a child’s name, photograph or detailed location widely can create additional risk. Use the event’s approved communication method. Volunteers should avoid privately improvising a search, transporting a child or handing them to an unverified adult. Record who assumed responsibility and when.

A second situation to discuss

Fictional scenario: A child is crying near a festival gate. Minutes later, an adult arrives, names the child and insists they must leave immediately.

Keep the child supported and involve the safeguarding lead. Use the agreed verification and handover process, considering the child's response and any conflicting information. Escalate urgent safety concerns to police and record the outcome.

Use a working record

Record the specific arrangements below before the briefing. Keep the wording short enough for a colleague to use during the shift. Where a field does not apply, explain why; where information is missing, assign a person to resolve it. Store personal or sensitive details in the business's approved system.

- Report time
- reporting location
- designated lead
- approved communication route
- authorised handover record
- follow-up

At the next handover, ask what changed, which action remains open and who now owns it. Close the record only when the agreed follow-up is complete. A recurring problem should inform the next briefing and the relevant operational procedure.

Check understanding

A missing-child report should be:

Reported immediately through the event plan Prompt coordinated action is important.

Information about the child should be shared:

Through controlled channels with appropriate staff Controlled sharing supports both the search and the child's privacy.

Two adults arrive separately to collect the same lost child

At a busy venue, staff are supporting a lost child at the designated point. Two adults arrive separately and each expects the child to leave with them. What should the team do?

Compare your decision

Keep the child supported and follow the venue's reunification procedure with the safeguarding lead. Verify the relationship using the approved process, protect the child's identifying details and refer conflicting information to the responsible lead. Follow emergency arrangements if there is immediate danger.

Practise a radio update that requests the lead without broadcasting the child's name or personal details. Record the handover decision and who authorised it.

Sources and scope

- Source: https://www.gov.uk/report-child-abuse
- Source: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safeguarding-and-protecting-people-for-charities-and-trustees

- Source: https://www.hse.gov.uk/event-safety/running.htm

Original workplace examples and suggested record. Prepared 19 October 2026. Use the current linked guidance and the venue’s procedures for operational decisions.

Use this on shift

Resource page and fillable working record · Read the online guide · Course details