



## Home-Start Network

# Looking After Children in the Absence of Parents Policy



We  
inspire  
growth

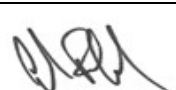
We  
prioritise  
kindness

We achieve  
**together**

|                              |                                                                                      |                         |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Title</b>                 | <b>Looking After Children in Absence of Parents Policy</b>                           | <b>Date: 31/01/2026</b> |
| <b>Author</b>                | <b>Assistant Director of Quality and Safeguarding</b>                                |                         |
| <b>Approver</b>              | <b>Impact sub-committee</b>                                                          |                         |
| <b>Owner</b>                 | <b>Director of Network Impact</b>                                                    |                         |
| <b>Published</b>             | <b>@Home</b>                                                                         |                         |
| <b>Review Frequency</b>      | <b>Annually, or following significant changes in legislation or network practice</b> |                         |
| <b>Next publication date</b> |                                                                                      | <b>January 2027</b>     |

This is a controlled document. It should only be altered or added to in the designated sections to demonstrate the local procedure, such as the level approved. It should not be altered in any other way without the express permission of the policy owner or their representative. On receipt of a new version, please destroy all previous versions. If you are reading a printed copy of this document, you should check @Home Intranet website to ensure that you are using the most current version.

| <b>Table of Amendments</b> |              |                                                                                     |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Section</b>             | <b>Date</b>  | <b>Reason</b>                                                                       | <b>By</b>                      |
| Rewrite of full policy     | September 25 | Original out of date and no longer fit for purpose<br>Review period moved to annual | Quality Team with consultation |

|                                                 |                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Title</b>                                    | Looking After Children in the Absence of Parents                                     |
| <b>Author/Owner</b>                             | Operations & Governance Committee                                                    |
| <b>Adopted Date</b>                             | 02.07.26                                                                             |
| <b>Last Review Date</b>                         | N/A                                                                                  |
| <b>Ratified Date</b>                            | July 27                                                                              |
| <b>Ratified By</b>                              | Board of Trustees                                                                    |
| <b>Review Cycle</b>                             | Annually, or following significant changes in legislation or network practice        |
| <b>Review Date</b>                              | July 27                                                                              |
| <b>Chair of the board of Trustees Signature</b> |  |

This policy (with levels specified) and its associated appendices were adopted by Home-Start Essex on 02.07.26 and is to be reviewed by 02.07.27.

Name: Graham Robjohns

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G Robjohns'.

Date: 02.07.26

This should be signed by the most senior person in your organisation i.e. safeguarding lead on board of trustees.

## **Associated Policies**

Trustees and members of staff can access our full suite of policies available on SharePoint. For volunteers, please ask your Home-Start Family Support Co-ordinator to provide you with access to these policies or associate materials. Policies can also be accessed via our [website](#). The most relevant policies include:

- Safeguarding and Protecting Children (UK Wide)
- Safeguarding and Protecting Children Code of Conduct
- Volunteer Policy
- Safer Recruitment and Selection of Staff
- Staff Supervision & Appraisal

## **Looking After Children in the Absence of Parents – Policy and Procedure**

### **Policy Statement**

Home-Start provides practical and emotional support to families with young children, primarily in their own homes. Staff and volunteers work alongside parents and carers to build skills, confidence, and resilience in nurturing their children. Support usually happens with both parent/carer and child present, allowing relationships to develop and parenting approaches to be modelled. Referrals are assessed in line with local procedures to ensure support is relevant, appropriate, and safe.

Sometimes families may request help to attend an appointment or activity. Where this fits the support plan and local criteria, a staff member or volunteer may accompany the parent/carer, providing practical support such as helping with children during trips to the shops, park, or school pick-up. The aim is to empower parents to manage similar situations independently in the future.

In exceptional cases, where no reasonable alternative exists, Home-Start may consider caring for children without a parent/carer present. This carries high risk and is only allowed if assessed as necessary and clearly beneficial for the child or parent/carer. Any such arrangement must follow this policy. Local Trustee Boards decide whether this support is permitted and the level of organisational risk they will accept. Robust risk assessments must be completed to manage and evidence decisions. Boards may choose not to authorise this type of support, in which case the policy does not apply. If the board approves only level 1 or level 2 care, then the parts of this policy that are not approved can be removed.

### **Purpose of this Policy**

This policy aims to:

- Establish a consistent and proportionate approach to requests for Home-Start to look after children in the absence of a parent/carer
- Ensure that children's safety and wellbeing are central to all decisions made

- Clarify how such arrangements support Home-Start's role in providing practical and emotional support to families
- Safeguard Home-Start staff and volunteers by setting clear expectations and boundaries.

## Scope of the Policy

For the purposes of this policy, a 'child' or 'children' is anyone under 18 years of age, in line with UK legislation and guidance, including babies and infants. Home-Start recognises the particular vulnerabilities of babies, especially those under two years. Risk assessments must carefully consider a child's age when deciding whether it is appropriate for a staff member or volunteer to care for them, and under what level or circumstances.

This policy sets out the responsibilities of trustees, staff, and volunteers regarding requests to care for children in the absence of a parent or carer. It also manages the expectations and requests of families supported by Home-Start. The policy defines three distinct levels of such support, each with associated risks and procedural requirements. While requests to look after children usually involve volunteers, the policy refers to both staff and volunteers to cover a range of situations and requests.

### Local Agreement Statement:

Each local Home-Start must set a clear maximum time limit for any period during which children are cared for without their parent or carer present. Home-Start UK recommends this should only be for as long as absolutely necessary and should not exceed two hours in total, in line with childcare regulations. Caring for children beyond this time increases risk and may require additional safeguards and protections to be put in place.

The Trustee Board of Home-Start Essex authorises approved staff and/or volunteers to care for children without a parent/carers present, in line with the levels of support outlined in this policy:

- **Level 1: Agreed**
- Level 2: [Tick if agreed]
- Level 3: [Tick if agreed]

Home-Start Essex agrees that the maximum period for which children may be cared for without a parent/carers present is up to two hours. This may be extended for a short period in emergency situations. The number of families supported at each level under this policy should be reported to the Trustee Board to enable regular monitoring of its risk and effectiveness.

## Principles

Any agreement to care for children in the absence of a parent or carer, as outlined in this policy, must be made in the best interests of the family and, wherever possible, planned and agreed in advance. The staff member or volunteer and the family should have an established relationship, allowing trust and familiarity to develop.

Local Home-Starts must consider the specific risks to staff and volunteers when caring for children without parents or carers present. These situations can increase stress and the potential for allegations. All parties must be aware of these risks and only proceed if they feel confident and comfortable with the arrangement.

Home-Start will ensure this policy, alongside mandatory Safeguarding Policies, is explained to all staff and volunteers during their preparation course and revisited regularly through supervision and ongoing training. Any breaches of this policy by staff or volunteers will be taken seriously by the local Home-Start.

## Recruitment and Training

Home-Start must follow its **Safer Recruitment Policy** to ensure that staff and volunteers are recruited safely into any role where they may have **unsupervised contact with children**.

When recruiting a staff member or volunteer **who may be authorised to care for children without a parent or carer present**, Home-Start **must** ensure the recruitment process includes the following:

- **Safer recruitment checks:**  
Criminal records check (DBS/PVG/Access NI) must be completed at the appropriate level for unsupervised work with children. Supporting guidance is available on @Home.
- **References:**  
Referees must be informed that the role may involve caring for children unsupervised for short periods of time.
- **Interview process:**  
Interview must include questions that explore the applicant's attitudes, motivations, and suitability for working with children, with a clear focus on safeguarding.

Staff and volunteers must complete and maintain all relevant training and sign the code of conduct, confirming their understanding of, and commitment to, mandatory policies before having unsupervised conduct with children. When caring for a child, even briefly, staff and volunteers must agree with the parent or carer on routines for sleep, feeding, and general care. These routines must follow recognised safety standards, including guidance on safer sleep, food hygiene, and overall child safety as outlined by the NHS or equivalent bodies. Staff and volunteers must be confident, physically able, and skilled to meet the demands of caring for babies and children. Home-Starts are responsible for providing and ensuring staff and volunteers understand the latest NHS guidance or approved equivalent, as referred to in this policy. Volunteers must ask their coordinators if they have any queries relating to this policy and its implementation.

Staff members and volunteers **must not** take children or families to their own home, or any location not previously agreed with the parent/carers and Home-Start co-ordinator.

## Medication

Home-Start staff and volunteers must never be knowingly placed in a situation where they are expected to respond to a medical need or emergency without the necessary training or supplies. Doing so could lead to harm and expose the organisation to risk. Parents and carers remain responsible for administering all routine medication to their children. They must ensure that any required medication is given before or after the period during which Home-Start staff/volunteers are providing support.

If a child is likely to need medication during the period they are being looked after, a risk assessment must be undertaken; this would likely mean that only Level 1 care is appropriate, i.e. when the parent/carer remains present and can administer any required treatment.

Staff and volunteers are not permitted to administer any medication (prescription or over-the-counter medication) to children or family members, except in a medical emergency where immediate action is required, such as using an inhaler, an EpiPen, or acting on the advice of emergency services. In emergencies, staff and volunteers must act only within the scope of their training and competence.

Staff and volunteers must not be asked to care for a child who is unwell. If a child becomes unwell during the support session, the staff member/volunteer must:

- Seek emergency assistance if required (e.g. calling 999)
- Contact the parent/carer or emergency contacts immediately.

## First Aid

For staff and volunteers looking after children in the absence of parents at Levels 2 and 3, and ideally also for Level 1, the volunteer must have completed relevant first aid training that includes care for babies and children.

To meet this requirement at no cost, volunteers may complete the St John Ambulance free online 'Family First Aid' course at [etraining.sja.org.uk](http://etraining.sja.org.uk) as a minimum. St John Ambulance have confirmed that this is available to all colleagues across the UK.

First aid training must be renewed at least every three years, or in line with the guidance of the chosen training provider. Home-Start recommends that approved first aid training covers: emergency care for babies and children, including how to respond to an unresponsive child, choking, and bleeding, as a minimum.

Home-Start staff and volunteers may occasionally encounter minor injuries (e.g. small cuts or grazes) while supporting children or adults. The following applies:

If the parent/carer is present (level 1), they should administer any first aid. At levels 2 and 3, where the parent has given permission, and the staff/volunteer is confident and willing, they may offer basic first aid, such as applying a plaster, if:

- The injury is clearly minor
- The volunteer/staff member is aware of any relevant allergies
- Good hygiene can be maintained

- Supplies are clean, sealed, and provided either by the family or Home-Start (e.g., at a Home-Start group).

If there is any doubt, or if the injury appears more serious (but not an emergency), the staff member/volunteer should:

- Advise the parent/carer to seek medical attention
- Inform their Home-Start coordinator
- Record the incident and action taken.

If the staff/volunteer could not contact the parent/carer and medical attention was required, they should seek help from NHS 111 online (or local GP out-of-hours service in Northern Ireland). For emergency/life threatening situations, please see the information below.

## Emergency Situations

In a medical emergency, staff and volunteers are expected to make reasonable, good-faith efforts to preserve life. This is supported by law.

In such cases:

- Call 999 immediately and follow instructions from emergency services
- Staff and volunteers must only act within their level of training/competence and confidence
- Staff and volunteers are not expected to carry out procedures they are not trained to perform.

Home-Start will support any staff member or volunteer who takes appropriate and proportionate action in an emergency.

All emergency incidents must be:

- Reported to the Home-Start coordinator as soon as possible
- Documented in accordance with Home-Start's safeguarding and health & safety procedures.

## Accessing Medical Help

Where a child or adult requires medical attention at a specific location (e.g. GP surgery, health centre, or hospital), and the staff member or volunteer is not authorised to provide transport, the parent or carer must make arrangements to take the person to the appointment/service. In the event of a **medical emergency**, the staff member or volunteer must dial **999** and request an ambulance.

## General Requirements

The Home-Start co-ordinator must ensure that the staff member or volunteer has:

- Emergency contact details for the parent/carer
- Clear guidance on how to seek help if needed

- A means of contacting the local Home-Start during any period of looking after children without parents/carers present.

## Transport

Transporting children in the absence of a parent or carer must be included in a risk assessment and reviewed regularly. Staff or volunteers may only use their own vehicle for this purpose if all of the following are met:

- Parents/carers have requested this, **and** the transport is deemed necessary by the local Home-Start, in line with this policy.
- The driver has informed their insurance provider and can provide evidence of appropriate cover for transporting supported families.
- Appropriate child safety seats are used, ideally provided and fitted by the parent/carers.
- The driver understands and follows legal requirements for child car seat safety.
- Annual evidence of the vehicle's roadworthiness (MOT, insurance) is provided.
- The driver holds a full, valid licence appropriate for the vehicle.

A record of the journey must be maintained (this could be in the volunteer diary), recording passengers, date, and purpose. Any accidents, incidents, or concerns must be reported immediately to the police, Home-Start coordinator/safeguarding lead, and insurers, and recorded according to safeguarding and incident procedures.

## Levels of Care

### **Level 1: Supervision While Parent/Carer is on Site (in the home, garden, or other premises)**

Purpose: Enable the parent/carers to carry out essential tasks, self-care, or spend one-to-one time with another child.

Location: Home, garden other premises (only where safe to do so). Parent/carers is on-site but not in the same room.

Requirements:

- Parent/carers provides verbal consent, either in advance or at the time.
- Staff/volunteer must feel confident in managing the arrangement; discuss with coordinator if unsure.
- Child must remain within sight and hearing at all times (excluding age-appropriate personal care).
- Dynamic risk assessment conducted by staff/volunteer; repeated care requires a written risk assessment, documented and agreed with coordinator.
- Sleep, feeding, and comfort routines must follow NHS guidance and be agreed with parent/carers.

- Personal care normally by parent/carer; if provided by staff/volunteer routines must be agreed in advance and approved by coordinator.
- Parent/carer remains responsible for first aid, medication, and emergency care.
- Staff/volunteer must have immediate access to parent/carer within the home.
- Activity recorded in volunteer diary and discussed at next supervision.

## **Safeguarding/boundaries**

Any concerns arising from looking after children in the absence of parents must be addressed following the mandatory safeguarding policies and procedures. Staff and volunteers must maintain professional boundaries with families, ensuring relationships remain supportive, respectful, and focused on the needs of the children and the purpose of Home-Start.

## **Supervision of Groups**

When staff or volunteers supervise groups of children without parents or carers present, arrangements must be planned in advance and approved by the coordinator. Clear ratios, roles, and responsibilities must be agreed, with a minimum of two volunteers always present and easy access to a member of Home-Start staff. Written parental consent must be obtained and retained, and a risk assessment completed. This must cover the environment, planned activities, emergency procedures, and the individual needs of the children attending. Staff and volunteers must be appropriately trained, confident in their role, and aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, including managing behaviour, safe handling, responding to accidents, and managing disclosures. They must receive appropriate and regular supervision, with opportunities to discuss their role within the group.

Emergency contact details for all children must be readily available, and appropriate first-aid provision must be in place. This includes having at least one person on the premises at all times during care periods who holds a current first-aid certificate appropriate to the age range of the babies and children being cared for. First-aid supplies must be easily accessible, with clear procedures for recording accidents and incidents. Parents must be informed of any accidents or injuries. Where this type of provision meets the legal definition of childcare, Home-Starts must ensure compliance with all relevant childcare legislation and be registered with the appropriate regulator.

## **Specific queries**

Where specific or unusual cases arise—such as complex medical needs or uncertain legal responsibilities, local Home-Starts are responsible for seeking tailored legal advice, for example through **ARAG Law**, and ensuring that such circumstances are adequately covered by their insurance policies, whether under the group insurance scheme or separate

arrangements. Parents/carers must be made aware that they retain overall responsibility for their children during any period of care by a Home-Start staff/volunteer.

## Appendix 1:

### Risk Assessment

Home-Starts may add to this risk assessment or use their own equivalent if preferred.

| 1. Suitable people and care                                                          | Completed/notes | Date completed/updated |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Safer recruitment procedures in place and recorded                                   |                 |                        |
| Criminal records check in place at the right level                                   |                 |                        |
| Relevant training completed                                                          |                 |                        |
| Policies understood                                                                  |                 |                        |
| Code of Conduct signed                                                               |                 |                        |
| Level of care discussed and agreed by all parties (family, staff and volunteer)      |                 |                        |
| Volunteer and child have had time to get to know each other                          |                 |                        |
| Staff/volunteer have suitable mobility and skills to provide care for the child/ren  |                 |                        |
| Parent gives consent for level of care (verbal for level 1, written for level 2 & 3) |                 |                        |

| 2. Assessing risk                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Completed/notes | Date Completed/Updated |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| <b>Access and security:</b><br>Is the area secure? Is there a clear exit point?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                 |                        |
| <b>Hazards:</b><br>Are there any obvious trip or slip hazards, harmful materials or equipment?<br>Is transport is required, if so how will risks be managed?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                 |                        |
| <b>Layout:</b><br>Where will they play? Is the layout suitable for visibility and supervision?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                 |                        |
| <b>First aid &amp; personal needs:</b><br>Are the child/ren's personal, hygiene and care needs understood?<br>What will the volunteer and child do together?<br>Does the child/ren have allergies or require medication?<br>When, where & how does the child/ren nap?<br>What/where will they eat and drink?<br>Are first aid supplies available?<br>Emergency first aid procedures understood? |                 |                        |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Supervision:</b><br>Is the adult-to-child ratio appropriate- e.g., how many children (consider ages) will the volunteer be caring for                                                                                                                                                                        |  |  |
| <b>Plans and emergency contacts:</b><br>What are the times of the activity/care period?<br>Emergency procedures in place?<br>Does the volunteer have an emergency contact number for the parent/s/carers?<br>Does the volunteer know how to contact Home-Start (staff or trustee) during/after the care period? |  |  |

## Appendix 2: Consent Form

### Looking After Children in Absence of Parents Consent Form

#### **Home-Start Family Support Co-ordinator/staff member authorisation**

I confirm that I have approved the named volunteer/staff member to supervise children on behalf of Home-Start Essex for the time/s, date/s, and at the location/s stated, adhering to the completed and regularly updated risk assessment.

I am satisfied that Home-Start Essex considers the volunteer to be a 'suitable person' with the relevant checks in place and has received appropriate training and guidance to undertake this responsibility. I am satisfied that the arrangement complies with Home-Start's policies and procedures.

|            |                 |
|------------|-----------------|
| Name _____ | Signature _____ |
| Role _____ | Date _____      |

#### **Home-Start volunteer**

I confirm that I have agreed to take responsibility for the supervision of the children listed below on behalf of Home-Start, for the specified time and at the agreed location, as specified below, adhering to the completed and regularly updated risk assessment.

I understand that during this period, I am responsible for ensuring the children's safety and well-being, and I agree to follow Home-Start's safeguarding, health and safety, and lone working policies and procedures at all times.

|            |                 |
|------------|-----------------|
| Name _____ | Signature _____ |
| Date _____ |                 |

**Parent/carer with parental responsibility:**

I give permission for the named Home-Start staff member/volunteer to care for my child for the agreed period/s and at the agreed location/s, adhering to the completed and regularly updated risk assessment. I understand that this arrangement is my choice, and that I remain the person with overall responsibility for my child during this time.

I give permission for Home-Start staff or volunteers to administer basic first aid and/or emergency first aid to my child if it was required. I have made my volunteer aware of where basic first aid supplies are kept and give them permission to use these if required.

- I understand that Home-Start volunteers are not able to administer medication, unless in an emergency.
- I have informed Home-Start staff and my volunteer about my child's care needs, any allergies and pre-existing medical conditions, and these are included in the risk assessment.
- I have provided Home-Start with at least one emergency contact that can be contacted in my absence.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3: Summary of Levels of Supervision and Support

| Level          | Description                                                    | Parent Location                          | Consent Required                         | Risk Assessment                                                                               | Location                 | Personal Care                                                         | First Aid Training                          | Recording Required                               | Coordinator Approval                                          | Notification to senior/trustee                               |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Level 1</b> | Supervision while parent is at home (e.g. resting or occupied) | On-site (e.g. in another room or garden) | Verbal (in advance or at the time)       | Dynamic (by staff/volunteer)                                                                  | Family home/garden       | By parent wherever possible; if required, pre-agreed with coordinator | Recommended (esp. for regular arrangements) | Yes – diary and supervision discussion           | Recommended, where possible<br>Required if ongoing or regular | No                                                           |
| <b>Level 2</b> | Supervision at home while parent attends appointment           | Off-site (temporarily)                   | Written                                  | Written, involving volunteer, coordinator and parent, including emergency plan.               | Family home/garden       | By parent wherever possible; if required, pre-agreed with coordinator | Required                                    | Yes – diary, family file, supervision discussion | Yes – required                                                | No                                                           |
| <b>Level 3</b> | Volunteer takes child out without parent                       | Off-site                                 | Written, specific to outing and location | Written, involving volunteer, coordinator and parent, including transport and emergency plan. | Agreed external location | By parent wherever possible; if required, pre-agreed with coordinator | Required                                    | Yes – diary, family file, supervision discussion | Yes – required                                                | Yes – safeguarding lead staff or trustee informed & approved |