

Is a holiday programme responsible for children who are dropped off before the programme opens?



Holiday programmes will often have a policy that they will only accept “duty of care” for a child once they are signed in by a parent/caregiver. But what if the child hasn’t been signed in? After all, children are often at school well before their classes start?

The MSD Standards for OSCAR require clear policies for the programme hours and duty of care – when does the programme open and what are the expectations when children are dropped off at the programme? Similar policies apply when children are leaving the programme.

Sign in and sign out procedures are part of the MSD requirements and programmes should stipulate that they will not accept duty of care until children are signed in. (Similarly, the duty of care ends when children are signed out at the end of the day.)

A holiday programme which commences at 9am may have a policy of allowing children to be signed in at 8.45 or perhaps earlier. Providing “early care” (e.g. 8am to 9am) will require extra staffing and programmes will usually charge for this extra time.

These policies need to be clearly communicated to parents when they enrol their children and then applied firmly and consistently. If a parent is allowed to drop a child at 8.45, they may try to extend this time frame out to 8.35. In our experience, if the policies are not enforced firmly there is likely to be slippage.

If a parent simply leaves a child, without signing in, we would suggest a prompt follow up, preferably by phone, to make it clear that signing in is a requirement and if it occurred again the parent would be expected to come back to the programme and complete the sign in.

If the child has not been enrolled at the programme the situation is more urgent – a parent/caregiver must be located as soon as possible. Proper parental consent for the current holiday programme must always be obtained before the programme can legitimately assume duty of care for any child. Regardless of what the parent may think they have done, if you cannot reach a parent/caregiver, you essentially have a “lost child” on your hands – in which case your only option may be to contact the police.

Similar issues apply for children not collected at the end of the day – firm enforcement of policies (including ensuring that emergency contacts are regularly updated) is crucial.

Read more: [What can I do if children are still at the programme after closing time?](#)