Preventing Injuries in Child Care

Injuries are the leading cause of death and disability for young children. Young children are at higher risk of injuries overall, and certain injuries are more probable at different ages. Toddlers are most susceptible to poisoning, preschoolers to drowning, and school-aged children to pedestrian accidents.

Children are more likely to be injured when they are not under appropriate adult supervision.
"Please give me that broken toy," teacher Katie said to the child. She immediately saw the danger of the unsafe toy. At the same time, Christina, the center director was checking the art supplies. In the kitchen, the cook was filling out the monthly safety and sanitation checklist.

All these staff members were showing their concern for the children's safety by checking the safety of their surroundings.
Dangers can be found everywhere in a child care center. Electrical outlets, cleaning supplies, woodworking tools, outdoor climbing equipment, and cooking tools can all cause injuries.

Staff members must closely watch for and remove these dangers. Failure to do so may result in accidents. Most of these accidents can be avoided.
Indoor Safety

Children need the freedom to explore their environment to develop and strengthen connections in their growing brains.

The classroom or family child care home needs to be a space where children of all ages can explore safely.
Indoor Safety

Even infants need time and space to roll or crawl. Instead of confining infants to cribs, high chairs, or playpens all day, set up a safe play space where they can play freely. Remember that children are curious and interested in the things they see.

Do a safety check each morning before children arrive to ensure that your indoor space is safe.
Indoor Safety

Ask yourself the following questions:

• Are all sharp or breakable items out of children's reach?
• Are cleaning products, medications, and other poisons in a locked closet or cabinet?
• Are small toys that could cause choking out of the reach of all children under 3?
• Have I inspected all toys to make sure there are no broken or loose pieces or rough edges?
• Are there doors, gates, or other barriers to prevent children from falling down stairs?
• Are shelves and other tall pieces of furniture anchored to the wall to prevent tipping?
• Are sharp edges and corners of furniture covered to protect children?
• Am I ready to supervise children's play carefully and redirect them if they begin to do something unsafe?
Preventing Injuries in Child Care

Accidents also occur more frequently when staff are absent, busy, or tired. Children can also be put in danger through abuse. **Child care professionals must be aware of the signs of physical and emotional abuse.** By law, child care professionals must report known or suspected child abuse.

As a child care professional, you will need to be alert to any dangers that threaten the safety of your children. In addition, your program must have safety limits and procedures. The staff must also be aware of their legal responsibilities for protecting the children in their care.
Preventing Injuries in Child Care

Supervise the Children at All Times

"It happened so fast - I just left them for a moment or two" said the child care teacher. This teacher did not understand that children cannot be left alone for even a moment. A teacher who is responsible for a group of children should supervise constantly.

Young children do not always understand the concept of danger. As a result, child care professionals must protect the children until they can protect themselves.
Supervision

Young children are unpredictable, quick, and fearless. They lack sound judgment because they lack experience and cannot see from another's viewpoint. They may bite, throw, push, or shove. All these actions can endanger others as well as themselves. Young children may not recognize behaviors or actions that can cause injuries.
Supervision

To properly supervise a group of children, keep your back to the classroom wall.

Focus on the interior of the classroom. The entire room should be visible. Move closer to an area if you observe children who need assistance or redirection. Likewise, constantly observe children who are not involved in an activity. These children are more likely to create potential safety problems.
Bumps and bruises can occur in overcrowded classrooms.

Make sure there is enough space for furniture and equipment. Observe children as they play. Can they move from area to area without bumping into furniture or other children?

If sufficient space does not exist, remove some furniture or rearrange the classroom.
Adult to Child Ratios

Adult-child ratio relates directly to safety.

A classroom should never have fewer adults than required by state law for its age level and group size. Having more adults than the minimum is even safer. These extra adults can step in quickly to protect children when unsafe situations arise.

At least the minimum number of staff members set by your state's licensing rules must be present all times. Failure to comply may result in the center's license being revoked or a citation indicating the center was not in compliance.
Adult to Child Ratios

Remember, if a child is injured, and staff/child ratios are not being met, the child care program staff (that's you) may be held liable.

Successful completion of mandated state training is an indication that you have been trained and understand state law, and your responsibilities as a care giver in a licensed child care program.

Make sure that you understand the rules that YOU are responsible for enforcing.
By law, young children are not expected to care for themselves. This is the primary role of the staff at the child care program.

The staff must ensure the children's safety and health. Education is a secondary function.

Center directors are liable for the acts of their employees. Liable means to have a responsibility that is upheld by the law. Having liability means you can be punished for failing to uphold your legal responsibility.
The extent of liability may vary; as a result, only individuals who are safety and health-conscious should be hired. The director needs to observe newly hired people to ensure they use good supervision techniques.

Child care staff can be punished by law for failing to follow state licensing rules and regulations.

That means that YOU can be held responsible if a child care program is out of licensing compliance where you are employed and you do not take appropriate action.
A safe child care program is one organized with the child’s care in mind.

This can range from child-proofing electrical outlets, to putting a gate across stairways. A safe child care environment also has clear spaces where children can move and play away from potentially dangerous appliances or poisonous substances.
Plan for Safety

Children must be kept safe from burns, objects falling on them, poisons, drowning, electrical shock, choking, entrapments, falls, weapons, loud noises, tripping, pinches, punctures, crushing injuries, and cuts. A safe child care environment is one that is organized with the children’s care and development in mind.

It has clear spaces where children can move and play away from potentially dangerous appliances, equipment, materials, falling hazards or hazardous substances.
First Aid

The center's first aid kit should contain everything you need for minor injuries at the center.

You may also need to give emergency aid until professional medical help can arrive. In centers with more than three classrooms, it is recommended that you have a first aid kit in each room. You must also have extra kits to accompany children going on a field trip.
First Aid

It is a good idea for a specific staff person to be designated as responsible for ensuring that the first aid kit is stocked at all times. The center’s health consultant should review and approve all medical response policies and first aid supplies. Each staff member must know where the first aid kit is kept. If you are going away from the center on a walk or a field trip, be sure to bring along a first aid kit. A small waist pack is a good way to carry supplies. At all times, at least one staff member per group of children must have current first aid and age appropriate CPR training.
Even with the proper training, it may not be easy to remember what to do when someone needs first aid.

If first aid is required, stay calm. A fellow staff member can skim the relevant section of your first aid guide to make sure that you are responding correctly.
First Aid

After treating an injury, remember to enter the necessary information in the center's Accident/Incident Log and complete an incident report for the child’s parents to sign and keep. Keep a copy of the incident report in the child’s file at the center.

If an injury results in professional medical attention you must notify your licensor and provide a written copy of the incident report.
The Injury/Incident Report

A child’s parents will be understandably concerned if their child comes home with bite marks, scratches, or bruises that appear to have been inflicted by another child.

They will be more concerned if no staff member talked to them about the incident or no one seemed to know where the marks came from.
Open Space and Air Quality

The cheapest big space available is the outdoors! Children should play outside every day of the year except in cases of extreme weather or air pollution. Outdoor play is healthy on many levels: it provides open space to decrease the spread of infections, a variety of opportunities for gross motor development, and balance in the child’s play and routine. Some children who have particularly high energy levels need lots of outdoor play.
## Environmental Safety

Consider the following suggestions for your use of space:

- Do not concentrate toys and equipment in small areas.
- Place cots/cribs at least three feet from each other and alternating foot to head so that air circulates freely and children are not breathing directly on each other.
- Provide a covered outdoor area if possible for shade and protection from rain and snow.
- Take children outdoors as often as possible, especially during the winter months when the indoors may be overcrowded and overheated and respiratory illnesses are at their peak.
Environmental Safety

Maintaining Good Ventilation of Indoor Space

Adequate ventilation, humidity, and temperature control increase each person’s resistance to illness and their ability to get well after sickness. In winter, dry, hot air takes moisture from the skin and mucous membranes. In summer, hot and humid air prevents a child’s body from cooling off well and causes overheating.
Therefore, pay specific attention to the air around you, and try to do the following:

- Keep air temperature between 68 - 85ºF, if possible.
- Open windows in every room every day to circulate fresh air, even in winter (except in centrally air conditioned or ventilated buildings). Windows must be screened, and not open wider than four inches to prevent children from falling out.
- Offer more liquids and sponge bathing in extremely hot weather to prevent overheating and dehydration.
- Provide extra clothing during sudden extremes of cold weather to maintain body heat.
Environmental Safety

• Ask parents to leave extra clothing at the program, if possible, or develop your own supply of extras from unneeded hand-me-downs. (Just remember that shared clothing must be washed between uses by different children). Hats should never be shared among children due to the possible spread of head lice.
• Use a cool air humidifier or cool air vaporizer to add moisture to dry air. Do not use a steam vaporizer.
• If you use an air conditioner, be sure that it is cleaned and serviced regularly. Air conditioners can build up molds and dust that are harmful allergens for some children and adults.
• Avoid strong odors in the program. Some people, including children, have allergic responses to smoke, perfume, room deodorizers, etc.
The Injury/Incident Report

When a child is involved in an injury, make sure the parents know:

a) How the injury occurred;
b) How the staff responded to the incident; and
c) What treatment was given, if any.

A written report covering the above information must be kept on file. Parents must receive a copy of this report.
Environmental Safety

Locks

When children are in care they should be able to open doors leading in and out of the different child care areas and to the outside. Doors should not be locked or too heavy to operate. Do not put child-guard covers over the doorknobs.

Think about removing locks on the doors that you do not need to lock for security reasons, including bathroom doors. If you keep bathroom door locks in place, hang the key or insert pin next to the door so that you can quickly reach a child who locks himself in the bathroom. Be sure to give instructions to staff about how to open the door.
Environmental Safety

**Locks**

If children and adults share a bathroom with no lock on the door, you may want to install a hook and eye. You should do this at adult height on the interior side of the door to ensure privacy.

To secure doors leading to the outside use door handle locks that disengage automatically when turned from the inside. You can also equip the doors with panic bars, door alarms, or bells.
Locks
You must not use dead bolts, chains, or other devices requiring someone to work a separate mechanism while children are in care.
For added security, you may wish to have your center’s doors locked from the outside. Parents will need a key, key card, or a special punch code to enter the building.
However, doors must be easy to open and remain unlocked from the inside while children are in care.
Caregivers must have easy access to a light source to use in case of a power failure. You may use flashlights or choose to use battery-powered wall lights. A flashlight does you no good if its batteries are dead. Check the batteries regularly and keep extra new batteries in a convenient place.

One way to guarantee you always have a fully charged flashlight is to use one of the rechargeable varieties. Keep it plugged in when not in use.
The child care facility must have the capacity to accept and respond to incoming calls during the center working hours. Answering machines are essential for answering the phone when you are busy with children, screening calls, or catching calls after hours. However, they should not keep parents from getting an important message to you about their child.
You may want to put a second phone line with its own number in the classroom. Parents must be able to get in touch with you immediately if needed. Be sure that your phones work in a power outage. Many cordless phones and telephone answering devices will not work during power outages.
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