Chapter 11: Promoting Children’s Safety

Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:
- list objectives for maintaining a safe environment for children.
- describe guidelines for promoting children’s safety.
- name ways to promote and practice fire safety in an early childhood program.
- outline the procedures for treating poisonings.
- recognize the signs of child neglect and abuse.
- teach children how to resist child abuse.
- explain types of liability as a child care provider.

Terms to Know

- limits
- emetic
- nonaccidental physical injury
- neglect
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse
- incest
- molestation
- statute
- privacy law

Reading Advantage

Before reading a new section, study any charts and tables. This will increase your understanding of the material.

Key Concepts

- The child care staff is responsible for providing a safe environment for the children.
- Child care staff members are required by law to report known or suspected cases of child abuse.

Graphic Organizer

Create a cluster diagram for safety. Place Safety in the middle circle. Make sublevel circles for the different types of safety listed in the chapter. Add third-level ideas to each of these sublevel circles.
“Please give me that broken toy,” teacher Tina Goldstein said to the child. She immediately saw the danger of the unsafe toy. At the same time, Gloria Hernandez, 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 accidents can be avoided.

Accidents are more likely to occur when the children’s routine is disrupted. Accidents also occur more frequently when staff are absent, busy, or tired.

Children can also be put in danger through abuse. Teachers must be aware of the signs of physical and emotional abuse. By law, teachers must report known or suspected child abuse.

As an early childhood teacher, 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. Because safety standards vary from state to state, consult your licensing standards.

**Safety Objectives**

The staff is responsible for providing a safe environment for children. The following are basic objectives toward this goal:

- Supervise the children at all times.
- Maintain at least the minimum adult-child ratio as required in your state.
- Develop safety limits.
- Provide a safe environment.
- Practice fire safety.
- Develop plans for weather emergencies.

Know emergency procedures for accidental poisoning.

- Recognize signs of child abuse and report any known or suspected cases.
- Teach children how to protect themselves from sexual assault.

The following sections will summarize procedures for meeting each of these objectives.

**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 teachers must protect the children until they can protect themselves.

Young children are fearless, unpredictable, and quick. 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.

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. Be especially protective of younger children. Usually, younger children require more staff supervision than older children.

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.
Maintain Minimum Adult-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 at all times. Failure to comply may result in the center’s license being revoked or a citation indicating the center was not in compliance. Remember, too, if a child is injured and staff/child ratios are not being met, center staff may be held liable.

Develop Safety Limits

Limits are guides to actions and behaviors that reflect the goals of a program. Limits have also been called rules. The most important limits set by early childhood teachers involve safety issues. These limits protect the children in the classroom. Make safety limits clear, simple, and easy for children to understand. Some typical safety limits include:

★ Walk indoors. Do not run.
★ Use blocks for building, not for hitting.
★ Wipe up spills right away.
★ Tell the teacher when equipment breaks.
★ Always fasten your seat belt when riding in the center’s van.
★ Always use safety straps on equipment when available, 11-2.
★ Climb the ladder to go up the slide. Do not walk up the slide from the bottom.
★ Wear a helmet when riding bikes.
★ Climbing the ladder to go up the slide is required by your state’s licensing rules.

Remind children about the limits. Otherwise, they may forget or ignore them. For example, Eino may walk in front of moving swings. When this happens, say, “Eino, walk around the swings, not in front of them.” Usually, this reminder will redirect a child. If Eino still fails to comply, you may have to say, “Eino, you need to stay away from moving swings.” Do not allow anyone to continue swinging until Eino moves a safe distance away from the swings.

Teach children to wipe up spills promptly. Always keep paper towels within the children’s reach. When children forget to wipe up a spill, remind them. Likewise, it’s important to praise children who remember. Say, “Gerald, thank you for wiping up that spill. Now no one will slip and fall.” Praise will encourage all the children to remember the limits. In time, you may hear the children remind each other of the limits.

Provide a Safe Environment

Closely observing children and setting safety rules for them to obey helps create a safe center. This is only part of the process. You must also keep watch for hazardous situations. Toys, equipment, electrical appliances, hot water, and cleaning supplies can pose danger to children. Center vehicles and the building itself can also be hazardous to children.

Toys and Materials

A teacher’s first job regarding toy safety is to choose items wisely. Picking safe toys and materials greatly reduces the risk of serious injury.

Selection is just the start, however. As a teacher, you must supervise children using the toys. Children often use toys in ways for which they were not designed. While most times this play is harmless, sometimes you must step in for safety reasons. For instance, a wooden mallet for use with a pegboard might be dangerous if children use it to hit each other. A metal toy car can be used safely for driving on the floor. This same car poses a safety risk if thrown, however. You must teach children about safe toy use and repeat safety limits often. Be firm but pleasant when enforcing the limits.

Remember, a toy can be safe for one child, but dangerous for another. Accidents can occur when children use toys that are too advanced for them. For instance, five-year-old children love to play with large marbles. These same marbles are a choking hazard for younger children.

Check toys frequently for safety.

Workplace Connections

Write a letter to parents explaining the preschool classroom limits and rules. Ask for parental support and encouragement in going over the limits with children at home. Some suggestions include asking the child why he or she thinks there needs to be a particular rule. Ask parents to compare the limits and rules that might be in effect at home with the ones followed in the classroom. Your teacher will review the letters in class and decide which one will actually be sent home with the children.

Survey the areas in the school that children access and then document any possible hazards they could encounter. This may include slippery walkways, loose flooring materials, equipment meant for older children, dangers in the parking areas, landscape plants, and weed treatments. What changes could be made to make the areas safe or reduce the hazards? Would child care centers not associated with a high school program be subject to the same types of hazards?
Tug at the different parts of the toy, such as glass eyes and buttons, to test its strength. If the toy lacks durability, remove it from the classroom. Depending on the condition and value, it can either be repaired or discarded.

Toys should also be examined for sharp or splintered edges. Observe to see if any small pieces have broken off or splintered. If a toy needs repairs, immediately remove it from the classroom.

As a teacher, you must also stay informed about changes in safety standards. When new standards are issued, check current toys to be sure they conform. Discard items that do not meet the new standards.

**Playground Equipment**

Staff members have several duties when it comes to playground safety. First, they must be sure to plan the play yard with safety in mind. For example, proper surfacing is a key safety concern. 

Second, staff members must select safe play yard equipment. Safer equipment eliminates many preventable accidents. Many products are available today to help children enjoy safe outdoor play.

Third, staff must evaluate existing equipment for safety. Older equipment may not meet current safety standards. This equipment often contains hazards not found on newer equipment. These hazards include head entrapments, sharp edges, hard swing seats, and all-metal slides. Staff should research laws on play yard equipment safety. They must be sure their program complies with these requirements. Next, staff can seek tips from professional organizations regarding play yard safety. These tips can offer extra protection by exceeding legal requirements.

As equipment ages, it is likely to need upkeep and repair. For this reason, all play yard equipment must be checked often for dangers. Many programs devise a safety checklist to guide teachers in inspecting the play yard. Teachers conduct weekly checks, fill out the checklist, and give it to the director. The director must then arrange for needed repairs or maintenance.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, staff are responsible for supervising children on the play yard. Even the safest equipment can cause accidents when it is not used properly. Limits must be set and enforced regarding equipment use. Children can be involved in setting these limits, if developmentally appropriate. Teachers must closely watch children using the equipment and step in when needed. Staff should praise children who are practicing safety.

**Transportation**

Motor vehicle accidents pose the greatest threats to children’s lives. Vans, buses, and other vehicles owned by the center should have safety door locks and safety restraints installed according to manufacturers’ specifications.

- All children should ride in the back seat of a car until at least through age 12.
- Children up to age 3 should ride in a rear-facing car seat until they reach the seat’s height or weight limits.
- Children age 4–7 should ride in a forward-facing car seat with a harness until they reach the seat’s height or weight limits.
- Children age 8–12 who have outgrown car seats need a booster seat, lap belt, and shoulder harness.

Check with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Web site for individual state laws.

Train all staff and parent volunteers on the proper use of safety seats. While riding in any center vehicles, children should be fastened in a properly adjusted seat belt or safety seat. Do not allow children to put their arms or heads out of the vehicle’s windows. When a number of children are riding in a vehicle, extra adult supervision may be required.

Center vehicles should be equipped for emergency situations. A first aid kit for treating minor injuries should be located in each vehicle. Moreover, a fire extinguisher and tools for changing tires should also be present in each vehicle. Vehicle drivers should be informed how to use these items.

**Building Security**

Safety measures must be taken to control unauthorized access to the building. Some centers issue keypads or card keys such as those used in hotels to parents and staff. Outside gates should have locks installed and be locked. Some centers also install observation cameras to monitor entrances and exits.

Many accidents that occur in centers involve the building and building fixtures. Windows, doors, floors, and stairs all may cause injuries. Doors should have rubber gaskets to prevent finger pinching. They should be designed to open to the outside and have see-through panes. This will help prevent injuries by making the children visible to anyone opening the door.

Keep windows closed at all times unless gates or sturdy screens are in place. Keep floors dry. If wax is used, use a nonslip type. Cover stairways with carpet or rubber treads. Make sure stairways are well-lit and free of clutter. Install railings at the children’s level on both sides of the stairs.

Sliding patio doors, doors with glass panels, and storm doors can all be dangerous. To protect the children, use only safety glass. Decals applied to sliding glass doors at their eye level warn children of glass they might not otherwise see.

Cover all unused electrical outlets in the building. Avoid using extension cords, particularly if they are placed under carpets or rugs. If the cord becomes worn, a fire may occur.

**Practice Fire Safety**

To promote fire safety, check the center regularly for fire hazards.
The best protection against fires is prevention. For instance, store matches where children cannot reach them and accidentally start fires. As a teacher, you need to find and correct fire hazards. A fire safety checklist is shown in 11-4. Study this list so you will be able to spot hazards and take action quickly.

Check smoke alarms at least once each month to make sure they are working. If smoke detectors are battery powered, change batteries when indicated. Most states require smoke alarms to be hardwired into the electrical system.

**Fire Extinguishers**

Each child care center needs several fire extinguishers. One fire extinguisher should be placed in or next to the kitchen. Place a fire extinguisher in or near each classroom. Another extinguisher is needed in the laundry area. Check your state’s licensing regulations and insurance company recommendations for the placement of fire extinguishers.

The director is often in charge of buying fire extinguishers for the center. Most states require early childhood facilities to use the ABC type of fire extinguisher. Before buying extinguishers, contact your local fire department. The fire marshal can tell you which extinguisher is best suited for your center’s unique needs. You will want one that fights the types of fires your center is most likely to have. In addition, ask the fire marshal how to maintain the extinguisher and recharge it after use.

Schedule a staff in-service on fire extinguisher use prior to the opening of the center. Some directors prefer to have a local firefighter conduct this in-service. After this orientation, update all staff members yearly (and newly hired members) on fire extinguisher use.

Check the condition of each fire extinguisher monthly. Note any problems you find. Replace immediately any extinguisher with any of the following conditions:

- **Pressure gauge indicating the higher or lower pressure than recommended**
- **Blocked nozzle or other parts**
- **Missing pin or tamper seal**
- **Dents, leaks, rust, or other signs of damage**

**Fire Drills and Evacuation Procedures**

Most state licensing rules and regulations require fire and disaster drills. Most states also require drills to be scheduled at least once a month. Vary the time of day (including nap time and day of week. These drills will prepare staff and children for a real fire or other emergency. During drills, use the daily class roster to take roll. It is an important tool for checking on the evacuation of all children and their safe return indoors. In addition, most states require monthly inspection for fire hazards.

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### Fire Safety Checklist

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Exit passageways and exits are free from furniture and equipment.</td>
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<td>2. Locks on bathroom and toilet stall doors can be opened from the outside and can be opened easily by center staff.</td>
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<td>3. Protective covers are on all electrical outlets.</td>
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<td>4. Permanent wiring is used instead of lengthy extension cords.</td>
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<td>5. Each wall outlet contains no more than two electrical appliances.</td>
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<td>6. A fire evacuation plan is posted.</td>
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<td>7. Fire drills are conducted at least monthly, some of which are unannounced.</td>
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<td>8. Flammable, combustible, and other dangerous materials (including hand sanitizers) are marked and stored in areas accessible only to staff.</td>
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<td>9. Children are restricted to floors with grade level exits (no stairs).</td>
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<td>10. The basement door is kept closed.</td>
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<td>11. There is no storage under stairs.</td>
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<td>12. Smoke detectors are in place and checked regularly.</td>
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<td>13. Smoke alarms, fire alarms, and emergency lighting are checked at least once a month.</td>
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<td>14. Matches are kept out of the reach of children.</td>
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<td>15. Toys, chairs, tables, and other equipment are made of flame-retardant materials.</td>
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<td>16. Carpets and rugs are treated with a flame-retardant material.</td>
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<td>17. Emergency procedures and numbers are posted by each telephone.</td>
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<td>18. Evacuation cribs fit easily through the doors.</td>
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*11-4 A fire safety checklist may include many items. Would you add any items to this checklist?*
Part Two  Creating a Safe and Healthful Environment

Creating a Safe and Healthful Environment

by trained staff and monthly checks of the emergency lighting system. Documentation must show that these inspections occurred.

Every center needs to have well-planned evacuation procedures. These procedures must be approved by a fire inspector from the local fire department. This approval occurs on an annual basis during the observation of a fire drill and building inspection for fire hazards. The procedures should include escape routes (and alternate escape routes), planned meeting places outside of the building, staff assignments, and location of alarms and emergency lighting. The evacuation procedures should be posted in every room where they can be easily seen. Emergency phone numbers should also be posted. In case of blocked routes, alternative evacuation routes should be planned. An example of procedures to be used is shown in 11-5.

If a fire is discovered in the center, sound the alarm immediately. Stay calm. If you panic, the children will panic as well. Evacuate children from the building at once, even if you do not see flames. Smoke, not fire, is responsible for more deaths. Leave the classroom lights on and close the doors. Do not lock the doors, however. Lights allow firefighters to see better in a smoke-filled structure.

Take roll as soon as the children and staff have cleared the building and have reached the planned meeting areas. When firefighters arrive, inform the chief whether anyone is still in the building.

Evacuation Procedures

1. Sound fire alarm.
2. Evacuate the building.
3. When leaving the building, leave lights on and close doors. Do not lock doors.
4. Call the fire department after leaving the building.
5. Take roll as soon as the children are together in a safe, predetermined place.
6. When the firefighters arrive, report whether all children and staff are out of the building.

Review evacuation procedures with children. Post the procedures in a noticeable place.

when making evacuation plans, remember that infants are more difficult to remove than older children. This is because infants cannot walk. Most adults cannot carry more than two infants at one time. Therefore, when ratios are higher than one caregiver to two infants, a careful plan needs to be made. Some centers practice by placing several babies in special evacuation cribs and rolling them out of the building. Wagons can be used for evacuating older children.

Plan and introduce fire and burn prevention into the curriculum, if developmentally appropriate. Remind the children to tell staff right away if they smell smoke. Explain that in a fire, clean air is near the floor. By crawling close to the ground it will be easier to breathe. Teach the children what to do if their clothing catches fire.

Figure 11-6 shows the stop, drop, and roll technique. Also, share books about fire safety and firefighters.

Sun Safety

The sun’s ultraviolet (UV) rays cause harm. The result can be skin damage, eye damage, and even cancer. The sun’s rays are the strongest between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. During these hours, the children’s exposure should be limited as it is the most damaging. Before going outside, always check the UV index. Daily newspapers often provide this information on the weather page. Otherwise, check the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Web site.

Stop, Drop, and Roll

1. STOP: Don’t move. Stop where you are.
2. DROP: Drop to your knees.
3. ROLL: Cover your face with your hands, and then roll over and over to smother the flames.

11-6 If clothing catches fire, the stop, drop, and roll technique should be used.
Early childhood teachers need to teach children sun safety precautions. Always apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen 30 minutes before going outdoors. The sunscreen should provide a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 or higher. Apply wherever the skin is showing. Reapply every two hours if the children remain outdoors. Also reapply sunscreen after water play for maximum protection.

While outdoors, promote sun safety by teaching the shadow rule. If the children cannot see their shadows, they should seek shade or go indoors. The sun is at its peak intensity at midday. To avoid allowing the skin to be exposed too much, the children should be in the shade by 11:00 a.m. or by 3:00 p.m. A broad-brimmed hat will help protect the eyes, face, ears, and back of the neck.

### Poisonings

Studies show that children under five years of age account for almost two-thirds of poisonings that occur each year. Nearly any substance can, under certain conditions, be poisonous. The National Safety Council claims that the average residence contains over 40 poisonous products. Figure 11-7 lists many of these poisonous products.

Children eat many things adults would not think of placing in their mouths. There may be times when you are not sure whether a child has eaten something. For instance, you see a child playing with an empty aspirin bottle. The child has powder around the mouth. When in doubt, always assume the worst. If the child has eaten the aspirin, failing to act may result in great harm.

If you suspect that a child in your classroom has eaten something poisonous, remain calm. Telephone the nearest poison control center. If your area does not have a poison control center, call the nearest emergency room. Ask for instructions on treating the child.

### Emergency Procedures for Poisonings

Poisoning emergencies often involve swallowing toxic substances. Other types of poisoning emergencies can occur. These include breathing toxic fumes and chemical injuries to the eyes or skin.

If any type of poisoning emergency occurs, follow these procedures. Do not rely on first aid information, antidote charts, or product information. Often this information is outdated or incorrect. The child may experience additional injury if the wrong action is taken.
Always contact your local poison control center for all cases of poisonings. When you call the center, be prepared to provide specific information. You will be asked to:

- identify any first aid procedures you have already administered.
- report the time at which the substance was taken.
- report the child's age and weight.
- provide the name of the poisonous substance.
- report the amount of substance the child consumed.

If the child removed the substance from a container, have the container with you when you call. Unless the exact amount is known, overestimating the amount consumed is better than underestimating it.

Do not keep emetics—substances that induce vomiting—within the facility. Syrup of ipecac is an example of an emetic. Never give a child syrup of ipecac or any other emetic. Some poisons, such as drain cleaner or lye, can cause serious damage to the child’s esophagus if vomiting is induced. These substances are called caustics. They burn going down the child’s esophagus. If vomiting is induced, they will also burn coming up.

One of the leading causes of poisoning in young children is plants. When eaten, many popular house and garden plants can produce toxicity ranging from minor to severe. They can cause skin rash, upset stomachs, or even death. Many common household plants are poisonous. To prevent poisoning, check with your florist before purchasing a plant for the classroom. Finally, teach children never to put any leaves, flowers, or berries into their mouths.

Neglect and Abuse

During the past twenty-five years, the number of reported abused or neglected children has almost tripled. Ninety percent of the abusers are family members. Neglect and abuse can happen in any family type or socio-economic group. Certain situations increase the risk. The three leading factors are financial problems, substance abuse, and the stress of handling parental responsibilities. Single parenthood, isolation from others, and teen parenthood are other factors. Violence between parents can also lead to abuse of their child.

As a child care professional, you are very concerned about the health and safety of the children in your care. You do everything you can to see that the center is a safe place for them to be. However, the children are not in your care all the time. When they are away from the center, some children are abused. Because you are with the children for several hours a day, you may be the one to notice signs that a child is being abused or neglected. State law requires you to report known or suspected cases of child abuse. Follow your center’s procedures for reporting.

Studies show that abused children often become troubled adults. Abused and neglected children are more likely to drop out of school, be unemployed, and commit violent crimes. When they are parents, they are also at high risk for becoming child abusers.

There are four types of child abuse: nonaccidental physical injury, neglect, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. Be aware of the signs of each type of abuse.

Nonaccidental Physical Injury

The most visible type of child abuse is nonaccidental physical injury, 11-8. This is physical abuse inflicted on purpose. Children being abused in this way often come to school with bruises, bites, burns, or other injuries. They may have frequent complaints of pain.

Physically abused children often refuse to discuss their injuries.
As a result of being physically abused, some children may show an unusual fear of adults. Kelly is one example. She was abused by her father for two years. A teacher at Kelly’s child care contacted authorities with her suspicions. Kelly had an unusual fear of adults, especially her father. Whenever he came to pick her up, she backed away and avoided eye contact with him. Child abuse was suspected for other reasons as well. Kelly often arrived at the center with visible bruises. She also wore long-sleeve turtleneck tops in warm weather. One hot summer day, her teacher was concerned that Kelly might be too warm. When she was changing Kelly’s top, the teacher found many bruises. Kelly could not explain the injuries.

Neglect

When children are not given the basic needs of life, they suffer from neglect. Neglect takes many forms. A neglected child may be deprived of proper food, medical and dental care, shelter, and/or clothing. Children who have been unsupervised may also be neglected. Neglect may or may not be intentional on the part of the abuser. However, the potential for harm is possible. Children who wear clothing that is too small or dirty may be neglected. Neglected children may also wear clothes that are inappropriate for the weather. They may lack warm coats, gloves, or hats for the winter. Children who are poorly groomed may also be neglected. Other signs of neglect may appear in a child’s health. Neglect may result in children who are too thin or malnourished. These children may ask to take food home. Constant fatigue, illness, or poor dental care may be other signs of neglect. These children may have a bad odor. This may be due to a lack of bathing. Wearing dirty clothes could also contribute to bad odor. Alert teachers should observe for signs of neglect. They must be sensitive to different child-rearing practices as well as cultural expectations and priorities. Signs of possible neglect include the following:

- the child often arrives early or is picked up late
- the child wears inappropriate or unclean clothing
- the child seems always hungry
- medical needs are unmet
- poor hygiene often results in odor
- the child appears fatigued or falls asleep

Derek is a neglected child. He often arrives early or is picked up late. His teacher observed that he appeared small for his age. After observing him for several more months, she noted developmental lags. He appeared to be lagging behind many of his same-age peers. Often he would ask when snack or lunch would be served. During cooking activities, he would try to eat or take food. He also complained of being hungry. Derek lacked proper nutrition. As a result, he was constantly fatigued and sometimes fell asleep. Observing these signs, Derek’s teachers suspected neglect. They compared information and shared their concerns. As child care teachers, they knew they were required to report suspected child abuse. They knew Derek would never reach his full potential without proper nutrition.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is abuse of a child’s self-concept through words or actions. Children lose self-esteem due to emotional abuse. Excessive or inappropriate demands may be made on the children by parents or guardians. This can cause emotional harm to children. Emotional abuse is the result of insufficient love, guidance, and/or support from parents or guardians.

- Children who are emotionally abused may repeat certain behavior over several months. Look for the following signs:
  - refusal to talk
  - unusual or unpredictable behavior
  - rare smiling or laughter
  - excessive clinging or crying
  - withdrawn behavior
  - destructive behavior
  - poor motor coordination for age
  - fear of adults

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is forcing a child to observe or engage in sexual activities with an adult. Rape, fondling, and indecent exposure are all forms of sexual abuse. Each of these acts involve adults using children for their own pleasure. Incest is sexual abuse by a relative. Molestation is sexual contact made by someone outside the family with a child.

There are many signs of sexual abuse. A child may have problems when walking or sitting. The child may complain of itching, pain, or swelling in the genital area. Some sexually abused children have bruises in the genital or anal areas. They may also have bruises in their mouths and throats. Some may complain of pain when urinating. Sexually abused children commonly have poor peer behaviors. They may show extremely disruptive or aggressive behaviors. Often they will regress to infantile behaviors, such as baby-talking, thumbsucking, or bed-wetting. Some will show a lack of appetite. These children often express affection in improper ways. See 11-9.

Reporting Child Abuse

Health care workers, social workers, school administrators, and teachers are mandated reporters of child abuse. This means they are required by law to report any
known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. As a mandated reporter, you should read your state’s statute, a formal document drawn up by elected officials. The statute will explain your legal responsibilities and the penalties for failing to make a report. To receive a copy of the statute, contact your local law enforcement office.

Follow your center’s procedure for reporting child abuse and neglect to the proper authorities. Your program must comply with the law, but may also have other guidelines in making a report. For instance, you might need to complete certain paperwork and report the abuse to the director or health consultant. Some programs designate one employee to make all reports of child abuse for the program. In other programs, each staff member reports these cases himself or herself.

If you must make a child abuse report, do so immediately by telephone. Include the name, age, and address of the child and his or her parents or guardian. Report the facts that led to your suspicion.

After the telephone conversation, confirm the report in writing. Make a copy of the written report for the program and one for yourself. As long as you make the report in good faith, you will not be subject to legal action if your suspicions are found not to be child abuse or neglect.

Should a child abuse case result in a trial, you may be required to testify in court. This may make you feel nervous, but focus on telling the truth. Your legal and ethical responsibility is to tell the court what you know about the case that will help the court protect the child.

**Background Checks**

Early childhood programs need to protect themselves from potential child abuse accusations. There is a licensing requirement of many states. A background check needs to be conducted on every new employee, student teacher, and volunteer. This check will determine if they have had any felony or child abuse convictions.

**Protection Education**

Planning for children’s safety goes beyond the classroom. Children need to learn how to deal with dangers outside the classroom. They must learn about sexual abuse and how to protect themselves from it.

Warning children about strangers has been a common practice for some time. However, only 10 to 15 percent of child abusers are strangers to the children they abuse. The other 85 to 90 percent are people known to the children. These people may be neighbors, relatives, friends of the family, scout leaders, siblings, or parents. Most offenders are men, but women are also reported.

Before age eight, 3.0 to 4.6 percent of all children are sexually assaulted. About 10 percent of these children are assaulted by the time they are five years old. Girls are reported as victims far more often than boys. Studies show that race, intelligence, family income, and social class do not appear to affect the occurrence of sexual assault.

Teach children to resist sexual attacks. They must first resist the offender by saying no. Then they must tell a trusted friend or relative about the attack. Role-play this process with the children. Give them phrases to use if they find themselves in trouble. The following are examples:

★ If someone tries to give you a wet kiss, shake hands instead.
★ If someone tries to get you to sit on his or her lap and you do not want to, say “No, not now.”
★ If someone wants to give you a hug and you do not want it, say “No thanks.”
★ If someone tries to touch your genitals, say “Stop. That is not okay.”
★ If someone rubs or pats your bottom, say “Do not do that.”

Children may have trouble identifying sexual abuse. This is especially true with people they know. To combat this problem, explain to the children the difference between good touch and bad touch. A bad touch is any of the following: a touch the child does not want or like, a touch that hurts or makes the child uncomfortable, a secret touch, or any touch to a child’s private parts (genitals). A good touch is wanted and appropriate. It does not make the child uncomfortable.

Suggest various scenarios and ask the children whether these are good or bad touches. In the classroom, encourage children to tell the other person when they do not want to be touched or do not like how a touch feels. Help them put these feelings in words. Intervene if a child persists with a touch after being asked to stop.

Children also need to learn how and who to tell if someone assaults them. Use puppets, charts, movies, or other materials to teach children this lesson.

**Helping Families**

Early childhood teachers are in a position to help families. Daily face-to-face contacts provide opportunities for recognizing families in crisis. Teachers can share parenting information on child development and management of behavior problems.
They can also guide them in seeking community programs and services. These may include:

- Parenting classes
- Self-help or support groups
- Financial planning
- Family counseling
- Help lines
- Preventive health care programs for children
- Nutrition for healthy living

**Promoting Resiliency**

Neglect and abuse cause children to feel vulnerable. Teachers can play an important role in helping children become resilient. The children benefit from developing a secure relationship with a trusting and supportive teacher. Knowing that someone cares can help them develop faith in themselves. They also learn that they are important. Over time, resiliency can be fostered when the teacher provides:

- Consistency and predictability
- Developmentally appropriate limits
- Responsive and stimulating care
- Encouragement for persisting and exploring new opportunities
- Positive expectations
- Problem-solving skills
- Praise for efforts and accomplishments
- Verbal expressions of caring
- Labels for feelings

**Liability**

By law, young children are not expected to care for themselves. This is the primary role of the staff at the center. 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 having 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, however. 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.

**Types of Liability**

Child care staff can be punished by law for failing to follow state licensing rules and regulations. Center staff can be liable for not doing the following:

- Obtaining a signed health form from a licensed physician for each child
- Requiring a staff member to have an approved physical and background check before working with children
- Providing safe indoor and outdoor equipment
- Operating a center with the required adult-child ratios
- Providing proper supervision
- Providing proper food storage
- Maintaining fence and door locks in proper condition
- Providing staff with information about children’s special needs
- Refraining from corporal (physical) punishment
- Providing a safe building
- Removing children who lack self-control and are a hazard to themselves as well as others
- Covering electrical outlets

Center directors and staff must keep constant watch over the center environment. They must ensure that it is safe as well as healthy. New teachers will need constant support from the staff and director.

**Forms**

Every center should develop a number of forms related to the health and safety of the children. Many of these forms direct the staff in the care of the children and protect staff members from possible liability. Two forms commonly used by centers are injury report forms and various types of release or permission forms.

Every center should have a standard injury report form. Any information recorded on this form is useful if legal action is brought against the center. Parents also need to be informed about the details of a child’s accident. A sample form is shown in 11-12.

Various permission forms should also be on file. These forms should be filled out at the time of the child’s enrollment. Permission is usually required for such items as special screening tests or walks around the neighborhood. To protect children from being picked up by the center by a stranger, unauthorized person, or even a noncustodial parent, a transportation form should be used. This form should contain the names, relationship, telephone numbers, and driver’s license numbers of people who have permission to transport the child to and from the center. Staff should check the identification of anyone other than the parent(s) who comes to pick up the child from the program. In the
event a parent wants to add or remove an individual from the list, a new form needs to be completed.

Privacy Law

The privacy law is designed to protect children. It states that a child’s records cannot be given to anyone other than parents without the parents’ permission. Give a child’s records only if the parents have made the request in writing.

Injury Report Form
Child and Family Study Center

Child’s Name __________________________
Date of injury ______________ Time of injury ______________ a.m./p.m.
Type of injury: bite, broken bone, bruise, burn, choking, cut, ear, eye, head, poisoning, scrape, sliver, sprain, other
Staff members present: __________________________
Witness(es): __________________________
Description of the incident: (Include specific information, such as where the child was playing, with whom, and with what.)
Description of injury: (Include specific information, such as type, location, size, and severity of injury and symptoms noted following injury.)
Action taken by staff: (Include all actions, such as treating injury, seeking medical advice or care, comforting child, and notifying director and parents.)

(staff signature)

(parent signature)

The information in an accident report form is useful for parents and teachers.

The information contained in this file is confidential and is not to be circulated outside the center without the prior written consent of the child’s parents.

Under Public Law 93-380: Parents have access to all educational records. According to this law:

1. You are not allowed to provide the information contained in this file to anyone without the written consent of the child’s parent or guardian.
2. You must advise parents of their rights concerning their child’s file.
3. Parents have the right to read and review the file. Moreover, they may request a revision of information in their child’s file.
4. Within forty-five (45) days, you are required to respond to a parent’s request.

File reviewed by:

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Use a form such as this to record reviews of children’s files.

Summary

Providing a safe environment for children requires a great deal of time and attention to details. Danger can be found in every corner of the center. These dangers can threaten both the physical and mental well-being of children. Protecting children from these dangers is the most important job of a teacher.

Child care professionals need to be prepared for any emergency. You should know how to handle accidental poisonings. Child care workers also need to recognize signs of possible child abuse and know how to report suspected cases.

Child care staff can be held responsible for failing to follow state licensing rules and regulations. It is important to know what those rules are and to know the extent of any possible liability.
Review and Reflect

1. Name four basic safety objectives.
2. Who requires more staff supervision, younger children or older children?
3. What can you do to make glass doors visible to children?
4. Name three ideal places to keep fire extinguishers in a child care center.
5. When a fire alarm sounds, why should you evacuate children immediately even if you do not see flames?
6. When are the sun’s rays the strongest?
7. What should you do if you suspect a child has eaten something poisonous?
8. What is an emetic?
9. Name the four types of child abuse.
10. List three behavior patterns exhibited by emotionally abused children.
11. Explain what is meant by a bad touch.
12. What is the primary role of the staff at a center?
13. List three unsafe situations for which a center is liable.
14. What access are parents allowed to records kept by the center concerning their child?

Cross-Curricular Links

15. Speech. Interview the local fire chief concerning the proper use of fire extinguishers.

Apply and Explore

16. Science. Arrange a visit to the emergency room of a local hospital. Ask the doctor on duty to discuss emergency procedures used for poisonings.
17. Social studies. Consult the psychology teacher at your school for information on the effects of emotional abuse on children. Find out about the following types of abuse: belittling, corrupting, isolating, rejecting, and terrorizing. Why is the loss of self-esteem from emotional abuse so devastating to young children?

Thinking Critically

21. Create a puppet play using phrases that children may use if ever faced with sexual abuse.
22. Design an evacuation chart for the classroom.
23. Write a brief essay explaining how you will keep children safe under your supervision and care.

Using Technology

24. Check the Web site of the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education for safety tips for child care centers.
25. Review the Web site for the National Program for Playground Safety to learn more about planning a safe playground.
26. Research pica, an eating disorder associated with eating nonfood items, on the Internet. How might preschool children be affected by pica? What is the possibility that children in your program will exhibit pica?

Portfolio Project

29. Many states require a specific number of in-service continuing education credits be earned each year by child care professionals. A fire extinguisher demonstration would qualify for an in-service training activity. Ask a representative of a extinguisher company or your school’s head custodian to give a demonstration. Following the demonstration ask your teacher to sign a certificate documenting your attendance. The certificate can be filed in the your portfolio as verification of attending a professional educational activity.