

This *Factsheet* provides an overview of child safety issues to be considered by services when developing or reviewing safety policies and practices. It provides an outline of essential safety topics and useful references for seeking further information and advice. Services should seek further advice and support on child safety from recognised health and safety authorities.

## The importance of child safety

All children have the right to be safe at home, at school and in their child care service. The provision of safe environments for children is essential to prevent injury and enable them to grow and develop. Injury is the leading cause of death for children, with approximately 5000 children in Australia each day needing medical attention as a result of accidents (Kidsafe, 2000).

Children naturally interact with their environment in an exploratory way. As a result the potential for injury often arises, particularly when children are using new equipment or developing new skills. The challenge for management, staff and families is to minimise the potential for injury and keep children safe.

## Safety requirements

Some Australian states and territories have licensing requirements that relate to the safety of children in services. These detail the responsibilities of services in providing safe environments for children. Occupational health and safety laws also exist to ensure acceptable health and safety standards in child care services.

In addition Federal and State and Territory government departments and agencies regulate for the safety of certain types of products. Standards Australia also provides standards and guidelines for child-safe equipment and toys.

The *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) Quality Practices Guide (2005)* requires that, regardless of variations that may occur between states and territories, services provide safe environments for children.

The service's insurance agency may also have requirements for the provision of safe environments for children. The service should obtain a copy of the insurance, licensing requirements and/or standards and ensure that it complies with these.

## Responsibility for children's safety

The management and staff of each service have a duty of care to provide safe child care environments. They can also offer advice and support to families for providing safe home environments for children. Children can be involved in creating a safe environment by being encouraged to play safely and participate in discussions and decisions about safety.

Management and staff can develop a culture of safety in the service if they stay up to date and aware of safety issues. Effective risk management methods, along with open, supportive communication, will allow staff and management to work together to minimise safety risks. Regular training in child safety will build team knowledge and assist in improving practice.



Safety training may include:

- Risk management and accident prevention
- Emergency evacuation
- First aid and cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
- Occupational health and safety (OHS)
- Water safety
- Use of fire extinguishers

Families can minimise safety risks in the home environment by being well informed and supported in child safety matters. Staff and management have an important role to play in providing child safety information and advice to families that is up to date and recognised by health and safety authorities.



When communicating with families consider the following:

- Are there opportunities for informal discussions about safety?
- Do families have access to safety pamphlets and website information?
- Is safety information available in the home languages of families?
- Which local safety authorities can families be referred to?

Children are more likely to be aware of and understand the reasons for safe practice if they are involved in discussions and decisions about safety. Staff can encourage children's involvement in safe practice by:

- Setting and reinforcing rules for safe play and behaviour
- Encouraging children to tell an adult if they see unsafe equipment or behaviour of others
- Role modelling safe behaviour and practice to children

## Safe environments

A safe physical environment will allow children to play safely and will enable staff to supervise and interact with them. Risks can be minimised by ensuring the safety of buildings, grounds, equipment and furniture, and the safe storage and use of dangerous products.

## Dangerous products

Children naturally want to explore the environment through their senses by touching and tasting things within their reach, including hazardous and toxic products. Poisonous and dangerous products such as cleaning products, garden and pest control chemicals, medications and sharp objects must be kept out of children's reach at all times. Poisonous substances should also be labelled clearly, but in a way that does not attract children's curiosity or attention. Spiders and vermin can also threaten child safety and precautions should be taken to prevent or remove them. To safely manage the use of dangerous products:

- Do not expose children to the fumes or sprays of dangerous products
- Do not permit smoking in any areas of the service
- Do not consume hot drinks in areas accessible to children
- Display simple warning signs and procedures for safe storage of dangerous products
- Minimise the use of toxic products without compromising hygiene
- Conduct and record regular audits of chemicals and medications to ensure they are stored correctly and have not passed their expiry date
- Obtain Material Safety Data Sheets from manufacturers that provide information about the risks and risk management of dangerous products

For 24 hour advice and assistance regarding poisons, contact the Australian Poisons Information Service on 13 11 26.

## Buildings and grounds

The service's buildings and grounds should be designed, set up and regularly checked to minimise risk to children. However, this should be balanced with providing an environment that is stimulating and allows children to take reasonable risks. All areas and objects including play areas, fences,

doors, windows, sand pits, storage areas, electrical cords and child resistant catches should be regularly checked to ensure they are in good repair and free of hazards. To ensure safe buildings and grounds:

- Carry out daily safety checks to identify and remove hazards
- Select appropriate play equipment for children
- Conduct and record regular audits of buildings and equipment to monitor and remove hazards
- Develop an action process for reporting and removing hazards
- Keep records of the maintenance and repair of equipment and buildings
- Keep electrical cords, double adaptors and power boards out of children's reach
- Cover unused power points with protective caps
- Regulate hot water to ensure it does not scald or burn children

The *Playground Safety Fact Files* (Kidsafe 2005) is a useful resource for reducing hazards. It is available from the Kidsafe website ([www.kidsafensw.org](http://www.kidsafensw.org)).



## Safe Practice

A risk management strategy that is supported by clear policies and procedures for specific areas of child safety such as emergency procedures, sun safety and occupational health and safety, will help ensure safe practice.

## Managing safety risks

Child safety can be maximised in the service by simply and effectively monitoring and managing safety risks within the service. All areas of service operations that relate to safety can be checked for their potential risk to children. To minimise the risk to children, all safety areas should be regularly reviewed and, where necessary, action taken to reduce potential injury or harm to children.

Managing safety risks involves three basic steps:

1. Identify the hazard – note hazards that may cause illness or injury such as faulty or damaged equipment or wiring, access to chemicals, infection, sun exposure, trip and fall hazards, and poor sight lines for supervision
2. Assess the risk – determine how dangerous the hazards are
3. Control the risk – take action to reduce risk to an acceptable level



## Equipment and furniture

Children's equipment and furniture needs will vary greatly depending on their level of development. When purchasing and maintaining children's equipment it is important to make selections based on their development, interests and needs. Children's play equipment and furniture should also be carefully selected, installed and maintained to ensure it complies with the requirements of recognised authorities.

It is useful to incorporate risk management into the safety policies and everyday practices of the service. For example, carrying out daily safety checks to identify and remove hazards will enable management and staff to quickly reduce safety risks. *Managing the Risks in Children's Services. An integrated approach to managing risk for children and staff* (Caton and Roche, 1999) provides sample checklists and action sheets, and is useful for understanding and developing a risk management approach to safety.



## Safety policies and procedures

Effective safety policies and procedures should underpin and enhance management and staff practice in managing safety risks to children. These should detail practices that are consistent with recommendations from recognised health and safety authorities and should be dated and sourced to ensure they are current and relevant.

Policies should be developed and regularly reviewed by staff and management. Families should be invited to have input to allow them to express their views. The involvement of these parties will assist in developing a common understanding and agreement about safety standards in the service.

Services may choose to address safety through a range of policies that cover areas such as dangerous products, food safety, water safety,

and supervision. Alternatively, one over-arching policy may be developed to cover all aspects of safety. The use of safety audit procedures is a practical way of monitoring and maintaining safety and minimising risk in the service.

## Supervision

Adult supervision is a key factor in providing safe environments for children. Supervision, together with other risk minimisation strategies, can prevent or reduce the severity of injury to children. Children often challenge their own abilities but are unable to recognise the potential risks involved. Staff need to actively supervise children to identify risks and therefore minimise injury. Staff need to be particularly diligent in attending to areas that pose a high risk to children such as fixed playground equipment. Effective supervision will reduce children's injuries and allow staff to meaningfully interact with and respond to the children.

### Further Information

- Caton, S and Roche, D. (1999) *Managing the Risks in Children's Services. An integrated approach to managing risk for children and staff*, Western Australia: The Lady Gowrie Centre (WA) Inc.
- Kidsafe Victoria. (2000) *Kidsafe Child Safety Resource Manual*, Victoria: Kidsafe Victoria.
- National Childcare Accreditation Council. (2003). *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Quality Practices Guide*. Sydney, New South Wales: National Childcare Accreditation Council.
- The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre, Melbourne. (2005). *The Royal Children's Hospital Child Safety Handbook Second Edition*, Victoria: The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre.

### Useful Websites

- Australian Government, Consumers Online - [www.consumersonline.gov.au](http://www.consumersonline.gov.au)
- Better Health Channel - [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)
- Cancer Council - [www.cancercouncil.com.au](http://www.cancercouncil.com.au)
- HealthInsite - [www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Child\\_Safety](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Child_Safety)
- Kidsafe website - [www.kidsafe.com.au](http://www.kidsafe.com.au)
- Safety Centre, Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne - [www.rch.org.au/safetycentre](http://www.rch.org.au/safetycentre)
- SIDS and Kids - [www.sidsandkids.org](http://www.sidsandkids.org)
- Standards Australia - [www.standards.org.au](http://www.standards.org.au)
- The Children's Hospital at Westmead - [www.chw.edu.au](http://www.chw.edu.au)



**For more information on QIAS please contact a NCAC Child Care Adviser.**

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