Safety and Your Child Care Service

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Monitoring and protecting the safety of children is an important consideration in all child care settings. The primary focus of the Quality Assurance systems is to ensure consistent quality outcomes for all children. The management of child safety is vital to the provision of a safe, nurturing and developmentally supportive environment for children in care.

When looking at creating safe environments for children it is useful to begin by looking at the whole environment to identify existing risks and potential risks and their solutions. This may involve all of the staff sitting down and discussing strategies for risk management at the service or gathering feedback about safety from families. Families are often aware of the safety hazards for their children in the home environment and may provide a different perspective to that of the service staff. They may also be able to identify safety hazards outside the centre such as the location of the service, car parking arrangements and access to the service.

Many child care services operate in buildings or premises that have not been purpose built for child care. In addition to this, many services

employ a range of electrical equipment such as portable compact disc or cassette players, fans, lighting, computers, fridges etc. It is vital that centre management and staff consider and implement procedures to manage potential hazards such as dangling power cords and children's access to power points and appliances. This is particularly important in environments where appliances and equipment are regularly moved to accommodate routines and activities. It is the responsibility of centre management and staff to develop procedures for managing these issues effectively, appropriately and consistently.

In many services there are certain areas such as laundries and kitchens which children generally do not have access to. However, it is important to remember that on some occasions children may accompany staff into those areas. It is necessary to be conscious of safety in those areas that are not typically accessible to children but which may be at certain times. The whole service should be taken into consideration when looking at risk management in the child care setting.

It is important that daily practices and routines, particularly in the area of child health and safety, be supported by written policies and procedures. These policies and procedures should be regularly reviewed, familiar to both permanent and casual staff and appropriately sourced and dated. It is necessary to ensure that child safety is monitored consistently and that well practiced and reliable procedures for checking, managing and reporting on any risks or dangers in the environment are in place.

A written safety policy should identify the procedures that are going to take place, how they are going to be done, when they are going to be done and who is going to be responsible for them.

One person or several people may be responsible for daily safety checks; this responsibility may be related to shifts or related to qualification depending on what works best for each service.

Quality Principles

FDCQA

Principle 2.1: The indoor and outdoor areas of carers' homes and play session venues are welcoming, comfortable and friendly

Principle 4.1: The environments provided for children are safe

OSHCQA

Principle 7.2: The service promotes a safe environment for both children and staff

QIAS

Principle 5.3: Staff ensure that potentially dangerous products, plants and objects are inaccessible to children

Principle 5.4: The centre ensures that buildings and equipment are safe:

Principle 9.1: The centre promotes occupational health and safety

The written policy should include procedures for promoting consistent safety inspections and some services may find checklists useful for this purpose. It is important that a new staff member or a relief staff member at the service has access to the information they need to correctly follow the procedures that are in place.

During Validation, the Validator will be looking for evidence within the service that risks are managed consistently and effectively and that children are kept safe on a daily basis. In observing supporting documentation, the Validator will be looking at where safety information has come from, how thorough it is and how it is used. The Validator will confirm that written policies and procedures are effective, appropriate and are occurring in daily practice.

With fresh eyes it is possible that the Validator will identify safety risks that have not been acknowledged by the service staff. The service may find it useful to get other staff, families or som eone from the community to view the centre periodically in order to look for those risks which have gone unnoticed in the child care environment. This should occur not only prior to the Validation Visit, but on a regular basis as an aspect of the service's safety monitoring procedures.

All children have the right to experience care and education in a healthy and safe environment. In developing systems to protect and maintain the wellbeing of all children and staff, management need to consider safety in the context of the whole child. Safety considerations should be balanced appropriately with the individual and developmental needs of children, taking into account current information as recommended by recognised health and safety authorities. As recommended practice in the areas of health and safety can change rapidly and significantly, it is vital that practice is supported by written policies and procedures ■

Further Reading

- Aronson, Sue (2003) "Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Environment" in *Child Care Information Exchange November/December 2003*

- Kynaston, Belinda (2004). "Researchers improve Playground Safety" in *InChildcare* (No. 4)

- *Department of Fair Trading In Good Hands: Baby Products and You April 2004.*
  Available at www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au

- "Safety in the Playground" in *Jigsaw Autumn 2000* (16). Pg 42

Useful Websites

- Kidsafe - **www.kidsafe.com.au**

- National Childcare Accreditation Council - **www.ncac.gov.au**

- Children's Hospital at Westmead - **www.chw.edu.au** - and other children's hospital websites