

risk reporter

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Safety at day care centers, nurseries

For years, religious organizations have played a vital role in the positive upbringing of children. Today, more than ever before, faith-based child care centers and nurseries continue to grow as parents search for spiritual, secure and educational environments.

“With dual-earner families becoming more and more prevalent, parents are looking for child care that not only teaches the alphabet and numbers but also morals and values,” said Brienne Friberg, program coordinator for Campus for Kids, a Christian day care/nursery in Madison, Wis. “Parents want their children to become good people.”

Like all child care programs, Campus for Kids is concerned about preventing injuries to children and staff.

National safety standards

Group day care safety regulations vary by state, but national standards are available. The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care (NRC) has developed a research brief establishing 13 indicators for quality child care. Barbara Hamilton, assistant director for the NRC’s Health and Safety Child Care division, said the brief is based upon a comprehensive standards document, *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards for Out-of-Home Child Care*,

containing more than 900 proven principles for excellence in child care.

The 13 indicators include standards for: child abuse reporting, immunizations, child-to-staff ratios and group size, staff qualifications and training, supervision/discipline, fire drills, medication procedures, emergency plans, outdoor playgrounds, toxic substances and hand washing/diapering.

“The standards set forth in *Caring for Our Children* are considered best practices,” Hamilton said. “We suggest looking to your state’s regulatory office for more specific information regarding the state child care laws affecting your organization.”

Child-to-staff ratios

According to the research brief, child-to-staff ratios and group size are two of the best indicators for determining the quality of a child care program. “Research shows that low child-to-staff ratios are better for not only a child’s safety but also development,” Hamilton said.

Staff qualifications

In addition to ratios, the quality of the child care workers also is key.

“Child caregivers should be encouraged or required to obtain education in areas of child development, health and safety,” Friberg said. “Educated teachers are more likely to

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RECOMMENDED CHILD-TO-STAFF RATIOS AND MAXIMUM GROUP SIZES

Age	Child-Staff Ratio	Maximum Group Size
Birth to 12 months	3:1	6
13 to 24 months	3:1	6
25 to 30 months	4:1	8
31 to 35 months	5:1	10
3 years old	7:1	14
4 years old	8:1	16
5 years old	8:1	16
6 to 8 years old	10:1	20
9 to 12 years old	12:1	24

Source: *Caring for Our Children*

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seasonal spotlight

Stay cool with these tips to help beat summer heat

For many religious organizations, a summer heat wave means much more than just an uncomfortable experience; in extreme cases, high temperatures threaten the safety of members and can result in illness or even death. In 1995, Chicago

experienced one of the deadliest heat waves on record with the unseasonably warm summer temperatures resulting in 485 heat-related deaths.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United States reports an average of 182 deaths each year due to excessively hot weather conditions. From outdoor activities during summer Bible school to religious services held in buildings without air conditioning — unseasonably hot temperatures threaten the most basic daily functions of a religious organization. With summer

temperatures on the rise, it is important for congregations to recognize the dangerous consequences of extreme weather conditions and offer members much needed relief from the summer heat.

“During the summer, congregations should monitor temperatures and be ready to take action in order to keep members safe when the summer heat starts to reach dangerous levels,” said Michelle Jantz, workplace health director for the Greater Kansas City Chapter of the American Red Cross.

“A good place to start is with local weather reports that give regular temperature updates and

a helpful heat index that indicates how hot it really feels when relative humidity is added to the actual air temperature. Oftentimes, individual state health departments will issue hot weather advisories, and the American Red Cross also provides guidelines for heat severity that can help congregations determine when temperatures are reaching dangerous levels.”

The American Red Cross issues warnings based on the severity of summer temperatures. A Heat Advisory is issued when the air temperature reaches 95 F before 11 a.m., a Heat Alert is issued when the temperature reaches 105 F before 11 a.m. and a Heat Emergency is issued when the temperature peaks above 105 F or does not drop below 85 F at night for three consecutive days.

Although dangerously high temperatures put everyone at risk for heat-related illnesses, such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion or heat stroke, some people are at greater risk than others.

“Those people most susceptible to heat-related illnesses are infants and young children, people age 65 and older, people who have a mental illness, those who are physically ill and people taking certain prescription medicines,” Jantz said. “It is especially important to educate people at risk and those caring for high risk people on precautions and practices that will help keep them safe and healthy during a heat wave.”

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Congregations to aid homeless

May 2004 — Six houses of worship in California have united to form a network designed to respond to the mounting number of homeless families in the San Francisco area. The Baytown Interfaith Hospitality Network provides food, shelter and resources to help homeless families find jobs and housing. Each worship center houses approximately 14 people for one week before the families transfer to another worship center within the network. Most families spend about seven weeks in the network, and 70 percent of program graduates will find permanent housing, according to network officials.

Source: *Christian Examiner*

Chapel unveils 9/11 exhibit

May 2004 — As a testament to the unwavering human spirit, one New York chapel has unveiled an exhibit honoring rescuers and volunteers who searched for survivors in the aftermath of 9/11. The exhibit features artifacts that were placed at the site along with interviews of rescuers, survivors and volunteers. Within days of the attacks, St. Paul's Chapel, located across the street from Ground Zero, became a sanctuary for workers to rest, eat and pray.

Source: *Associated Press*

Colorado congregations offer high-tech worship

May 2004 — In an effort to keep up with an ever-changing culture, some Colorado worship centers are using technology to make worship relevant in the new millennium. Places of worship are finding ways to experiment with technology including projecting scenes from mission trips and showing videos of newly baptized members.

Source: *Denver Post*

Employee and volunteer screening

Many pastors and board members realize the importance of performing background searches on employees and volunteers but do not know where to turn.



To assist customers, Church Mutual has formed an alliance with ScreenNow, a Web-based background screening service owned by Atlanta-based ChoicePoint. ScreenNow provides a variety of screening solutions including national, state and county criminal searches, state sexual offender searches, identity verification and driver's license reports. Church Mutual customers receive a 10 percent discount on all screening services. For more information, visit the Church Mutual Web site at www.churchmutual.com, click on “Our Business Partners” and select the ScreenNow link. If you have questions, call 1-800-853-2414.

A PERSPECTIVE

The safety and well-being of a congregation depends largely on the integrity of its employees and volunteers. Is your congregation taking steps to ensure it hires the right person for the job?

Risk Reporter spoke with Sgt. Douglas J. Kubacki, at the Milwaukee Police Department, regarding the importance of conducting background checks for prospective congregation volunteers. A veteran member of the Milwaukee Police Department, Sgt. Kubacki plays an integral role in conducting extensive background investigations of potential department employees.

Risk Reporter: *Why are background checks so important for religious organization employees and what can they uncover?*

Sgt. Kubacki: When a place of worship is seeking to hire a new employee or volunteer, they are not only looking for the best candidate possible, they also are looking for someone who will represent their organization properly. Implementing screening procedures as part of the application process communicates to potential applicants and to your congregation that you are serious about protecting your members and your organization's reputation. Having screening procedures in place also helps to defend a congregation against allegations of negligent selection of volunteers and employees.

Looking at a person's past is also a good way to predict their actions in the future. In conducting a background check, I recommend searching back at least five to seven years to collect information — within that amount of time, patterns of criminal, destructive or dangerous behavior usually begin to appear and can be good indicators of disturbing behavior in the future.

RR: *What information should a congregation request on an application form in order to conduct a complete background investigation?*

SK: Start by consulting with an attorney to determine what criteria your state allows you to include in the screening process. An organization must then receive permission from the applicant to conduct any type of screening or background investigation. Therefore, it is important to include a permission statement on the application and require the applicant's signature. The application

also should include the person's full name, current and previous residences, date of birth, Social Security number and position they are applying for. I also recommend requesting information about any prior criminal convictions, employment and education history and at least three references.

RR: *What basic screening practices would you recommend for all prospective congregation volunteers?*


SK: Start by verifying the information on the application such as volunteer and work history. Any inconsistencies in application information should be an immediate red flag for the interviewer about the credibility of the applicant. Conduct a face-to-face interview with the applicant and contact all of the references listed. Your local police department is a good resource for information on training staff to conduct personal interviews.

Also, check with local and state police departments to receive an applicant's criminal record. The criminal record will disclose any previous arrests or convictions the applicant may have incurred and detail any criminal activity such as sexual abuse or drug charges.

Congregations also can enlist the help of a screening agency to perform a variety of background checks including national criminal records, credit and motor vehicle checks and Social Security, identity, education and employment verification.

RR: *Should the type of background check performed vary by position within the congregation?*

SK: Absolutely. The congregation should develop a set of guidelines for volunteer screening that list the types of background checks performed for each position. For example, it is very important to run a personal credit check on someone who will be handling the congregation's finances. If a position requires driving, request a motor vehicle record, or for a position that has exclusive contact with children, consult the sex offender and child abuse registry. It also is wise to conduct screenings, such as motor vehicle and credit checks on a regular basis.

For more information on screening services available, contact your local police department or see the background screening article to the right. 



nurture physical and mental health, promote safety and stimulate cognitive development.”

Campus for Kids strives to hire teachers with bachelor’s degrees in elementary education. Friberg said continuing education courses also are offered at staff meetings on a monthly basis.

Proper medication administration

“With more children in day care, a need for administering medication for chronic illness, such as diabetes, becomes an issue,” Hamilton said. “Our standards recommend that parents, physicians and child care providers work together to ensure proper administration of all medications, over-the-counter and otherwise.”

Friberg thinks dispensing drugs deserves a three-prong approach.

“Parents, doctors and day care centers really need to work together,” Friberg said. “At Campus for Kids, there are select staff members with proper training to administer children’s medications.”

Most state laws will not allow day care centers to give a child any kind of medicine without a parent-signed medication release form and written notice from a doctor.

Asthma and other allergies

Asthma and other allergies are also a common concern for day care centers. Hamilton suggests drafting emergency plans to deal with asthma attacks and other allergic reactions.

“For example, if a child has an allergic reaction to peanut butter, staff should have a plan for the individual child on how to handle his/her food allergies,” Hamilton said. “People need to be trained for such instances, and children’s needs must be addressed on an ongoing basis.”

Immunizations/cleanliness

Group day care centers have been linked to several illness outbreaks. Establishing immunization requirements and cleanliness procedures are the best practices for decreasing the number of disease occurrences. The Caring for Our Children research brief




suggests using the latest immunization schedule issued by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the U.S. Public Health Service and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Utilizing appropriate hand washing and diapering techniques goes a long way in preventing illness. Friberg says washing hands before and after meals, after using the bathroom or changing diapers and after handling classroom pets is a must. Having procedures for diapering also is important for day care centers and nurseries.

Playground safety

Campus for Kids has a 31-acre outdoor play area including playgrounds, a soccer field, a baseball diamond and walking paths. With all this room to roam, the organization is forced to have strict outdoor play supervision.

“We only send two classrooms out at a time, and two teachers are assigned to watch the play areas at all times,” Friberg said. “For example, one teacher will watch the children playing in the sandbox while the other watches the children on the swings and slides. We believe this benefits curriculum as well as safety allowing teachers to interact with the children playing in each of those areas.”


To obtain more information about Campus for Kids, visit www.lakecitychurch.org or call (608) 221-1529. 

The American Red Cross offers the following information on what to do when a heat wave is predicted or happening:

- Avoid strenuous activity or schedule congregation activities during the coolest part of the day — usually 4 a.m. to 7 a.m.
- Stay indoors as much as possible. If air conditioning is not available, stay on the lowest floor or visit a public building with air conditioning for several hours each day.
- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting and light-colored clothing.
- Check on elderly and high risk individuals at least once a day during a heat emergency.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Avoid beverages with caffeine and alcohol.

With proper planning, congregations also can act as a resource for relief and care during heat emergencies.

“Start by coordinating a ‘check on your neighbor’ program with people who can call on elderly or high risk members of the congregation,” Jantz said. “Organize a collection of fans, air conditioners and donations for low income and high risk people in the community, or open up your place of worship as a heat emergency shelter, offering people a cool, comfortable and free place to escape from the heat.”

For more information on beating the summer heat, visit the American Red Cross Web site at www.redcross.org. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about national child care health and safety standards, visit the NRC Health and Safety in Child Care Web site, <http://nrc.uchsc.edu>, or call (800) 598-KIDS.



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