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## **PLANNING AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS**

### **Introduction**

A critical incident has the potential to compromise the health and safety of the children and staff, as well as the integrity of the child care program and its sponsoring agency or owner-operator. This print resource is designed to help organizations and their child care programs plan an effective response to critical incidents.

#### **This package includes information about:**

- Points to Consider in Preventing and Responding to Critical Incidents
- A Framework for Preparing for Critical Incidents
- Analysis of a Critical Incident

### **Points to Consider in Preventing and Responding to Critical Incidents**

Common to all incidents are four issues that need to be reflected in Policies and Procedures:

- Confidentiality
- Communication
- Documentation
- Support for Staff

### **Confidentiality**

#### ***Preventative and Post Incident:***

Information concerning children must be treated as confidential unless the child's legal guardian provides written consent for information to be shared. This written consent should state what information may be shared and with whom. Information concerning families, staff and volunteers must also be treated as confidential unless the individual concerned gives consent for information to be shared. Confidentiality must be respected and maintained by child care providers, board members, owner-operators and volunteers.

***NOTE: Legislation may require that certain information be shared without consent, For example:***

- ***Child Family and Community Service Act***
- ***Community Care And Assisted Living Act***
- ***information that is subpoenaed or accessed by a Court Order must be shared without consent.***

## Communication

### Preventative:

- Ensure families are familiar with the child care program's philosophy and practices, particularly in the areas of physical care and guidance.
- Involve families in making decisions about their children, and in the operation of the program where appropriate.
- Keep families informed of what's happening in the program.
- Ensure lines of communication between board/owner-operator and child care staff are clear.
- Maintain effective communication with relevant external agencies.
- Identify a media spokesperson (typically a board member or owner-operator and/or a senior manager).

### Post Incident:

- Provide families with appropriate facts about the incident while ensuring that confidentiality is maintained.
- Provide staff and other adults with adequate opportunities to debrief.
- Ensure children and families are provided with opportunities to discuss issues or ask questions arising from the incident with child care staff and board members or owner-operator.
- Provide required information to the appropriate external agencies *e.g. insurance company, licensing, police.*
- Direct all requests from the media to the media spokesperson.

## Documentation

### Preventative:

- Keep all registration and health information for each child up-to-date.
- Ensure consent forms are completed and filed as required *e.g. emergency consents; taking and use of photos/videos; field trips; administration of medication; release of information.*
- Develop and file individual care plans for children with extra support needs.
- Ensure nursing support plans are in place for children with nursing support needs.
- Keep a daily log book of non-reportable incidents including minor accidents, behavioural observations and unexpected events.
- Maintain objective notes and records.
- In keeping with the *Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA)*, store all personal information in a secure, locked cupboard or cabinet.

### Post Incident:

- Maintain written records of the incident and actions taken, including dates, times, location, people involved, equipment being used, etc.
- Complete all required forms *e.g. Incident Report form, insurance forms, etc.*
- Objectively record the facts. Any documentation can be accessed by a Court Order or a subpoena and may also be accessed through the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.*

## Support for Child Care Providers

### Preventative:

- Provide an environment that respects and supports the work of all caregivers.

- Ensure staff orientation includes a focus on policies and procedures related to critical incidents.
- Identify and utilize outside resources that provide appropriate support when needed.

Post Incident:

- Ensure child care providers know and follow policies and procedures related to critical incidents.
- Ensure resources are available to assist staff with debriefing.
- Ensure internal systems of support are in place.

## **A Framework for Preparing for Critical Incidents**

Every child care program or family child care provider needs to have policies and procedures in place to prevent critical incidents from occurring, and to ensure that there is an effective response if an incident does occur. This will enable the documentation and reporting of critical incidents to be done in a timely manner.

Well-written policies and procedures not only guide child care providers and those responsible for governance of the program (e.g. the board or owner-operator), but also demonstrate that those in charge are mindful of the health and safety of the children in care.

### **1. Policies and procedures need to be congruent with and reflect**

- applicable legislation  
*e.g. Community Care and Assisted Living Act; Child Care Licensing Regulation; Child, Family and Community Service Act; Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Human Rights Act; etc.*
- a code of ethics  
*e.g. ECEBC*
- recognized standards of best practice  
*e.g. Developmentally Appropriate Practice, NAEYC*

### **2. Higher areas of risk:**

Although there is potential for a critical incident to occur whenever and wherever child care is provided, the higher areas of risk include

- allegations of child abuse  
*e.g. against staff or volunteers*
- outbreak of communicable disease  
*e.g. HIV, scabies*
- issues of custody/guardianship  
*e.g. authority to sign consents, release of children*
- guiding behaviour  
*e.g. use of a restraint that is not approved and documented in a child's care plan*
- injuries, on and off site  
*e.g. needle sticks, falls, poisoning*
- pick up of children  
*e.g. unauthorized person, alleged impaired person, non pick up*
- missing or lost child  
*e.g. abduction, child running away, child lost on a field trip*
- termination of service  
*e.g. inability of child care program to meet the needs of the child and/or the family*
- reporting child abuse  
*e.g. child discloses abuse, physical indicators of possible abuse*

In some cases the incident itself may not be critical. However, the way in which it is handled may have negative impacts on and/or determine the outcome. An organization or child care program that has carefully considered areas of risk and ensured that appropriate policies and procedures are in place will minimize the negative impact of most incidents.

## Analysis of a Critical Incident

Debriefing should take place after any critical incident to assist those involved to work through their feelings and reactions to the situation. It is also essential to review the incident in consultation with the appropriate resources to determine what might be done to reduce the likelihood of the incident recurring and what should be done differently should it recur. Any changes need to be communicated to all staff and reflected in written policies and procedures and other relevant documents.

### Example

This example provides some suggestions for policies and procedures related to field trips.

#### Field Trips: Missing Child

##### Preventative:

- Maintain liability insurance for off site activities
- Get signed consent by legal guardian for each child to participate
- Have staff research and/or be familiar with the site to ensure it is appropriate for children  
*e.g. phones, washrooms, hazards*
- Maintain appropriate staff:child ratio [*consider whether the ratio required by the licensing regulation is sufficient to ensure the safety of the children on a particular trip*]
- Identify items to be taken on field trip  
*e.g. cell phone, first aid kit, emergency consent cards, list of participating children*
- Use method[s] of ensuring children are accounted for at all times  
*e.g. frequency of headcounts, small groups, buddies, field trip shirts/hats*
- Provide clearly defined roles for staff and volunteers

##### Post Incident:

- Search the immediate area.
- Notify field trip site staff, family, centre administration, police and licensing of the lost child.
- Comfort and ensure the safety of the other children.
- Respond to the media if necessary.
- Document the incident and complete relevant forms.  
*e.g. Incident Report form.*
- Notify other families, and provide further opportunities for families to meet with staff and board or owner-operator.
- Notify other agencies/departments.  
*e.g. insurance, risk management*
- Provide opportunities for staff and others to debrief.
- Analyze the incident, develop recommendations as appropriate and implementing necessary changes to reduce the possibility of such an incident recurring.

## **More information**

**The B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect: for service providers;** Ministry of Children and Family Development

**Children with Nursing Support Needs - Recommended Practices for the Child Care Field;** ECEBC

**Code of Ethics;** ECEBC

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice for Early Childhood Programs;** National Association for the Education of Young Children

**HIV/AIDS and Child Care;** Canadian Child Care Federation

**Westcoast INFORM Guide: *An Administration Manual for Non-Profit Child Care in B.C.*;** Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre

**Policies and Procedures for Child Care Programs: Tough and Sensitive Issues, Parts 1 and 2;** Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre

**Preventing Injury in Child Care Settings;** B.C. Ministry of Health, Community Care Facilities Licensing

**Taking Care: A Child Abuse Prevention Manual for Canadian Early Childhood Educators;** ECEBC

**Well Beings;** Canadian Pediatric Society

These and other resources are available through the Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre Library or website. Phone 604.709.5661 or toll-free 1.877.262.0022 or visit our website at [www.wstcoast.org](http://www.wstcoast.org).

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