
The Best Practices for Managing Early Childhood Learning Centers and Playgrounds on Campus

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Executive Summary

Early childhood learning centers present unique risks to a university primarily due to the age groups involved. Providing eight hours of daily supervision for children age three months to six years is not passive responsibility. While some universities own and operate the early childhood learning center, others prefer to contract with an experienced service provider for the school that operates a early childhood learning center, the following Best Practices will provide guidance to minimize the associated risks for the school that prefers to contract the service, the Best Practices are performance measurement criteria for assessing the quality of the facility and administration.

Included in this Best Practices are ideas on:

- Organizational Structure
- School and Staff Responsibilities
- Supervision
- Facilities including Outdoor Playgrounds
- Field Trips
- Transportation

A child is injured on a playground an average of every 2½ minutes and the frequency increases each year due to population growth. This Best Practice also includes:

- Criteria for Safe Playground Design and Construction
- Recommended Signage
- Guidelines for site and equipment inspection and maintenance

Organization

- The Director of Operations for the early childhood learning center operated by the school reports to a “Board of Trustees” for the center including:
 - ◆ Chief Financial Officer
 - ◆ Director of Public Safety
 - ◆ Senior Education Department Faculty Member
 - ◆ Director of Facilities
 - ◆ General Counsel’s Officeas well as a business administrator on campus

- Contracts for early childhood learning services are administered by the Director of Administrative Services

- The early childhood learning center organization includes a Director of Operations, several state certified teachers (BA or MA), several associate teachers (BA or AA).

- Campus Facilities Department provides maintenance and repair for school operated programs

- Public Safety performs background checks on all teachers and staff volunteers.

Responsibilities

- General Counsel's Office
 - ◆ Obtains and reviews state law related licensing and employment for early childhood learning centers
 - ◆ Reviews advertising, exculpatory agreements and medical consent forms issues by the center.

- Director of Operations
 - ◆ Assures the education mission is attained
 - ◆ Assures the facility is inspected daily and hazards are removed from child access
 - ◆ Assures all equipment, toys, materials conform to safety guidelines for the respective age groups
 - ◆ Assures adequate supervision is on hand at all times
 - ◆ Assures appropriate action is carried out for behavioral problems and health risks
 - ◆ Assures the annual maintenance and material budgets are adequate.
 - ◆ Oversee the center's application for accreditation by the National Childcare Accreditation Council

- Public Safety
 - ◆ Performs fingerprint and motor vehicle record checks for existing employees and prospective employees and volunteers
 - ◆ Teachers, Associates, Volunteers remain observant for hazards and risky activities and act promptly to eliminate the risk
 - ◆ Assure housekeeping is maintained throughout the day

- Insurance/Risk Management

- ◆ Recommends insurance requirements for contracted services
 - \$10,000,000+ comprehensive liability insurance
 - Statutory workers' compensation and Employers' Liability insurance
 - \$5,000,000 automobile liability insurance
 - professional liability insurance

- ◆ Considers enrolling "volunteers" in the university workers' compensation program if not a contract service

- ◆ Recommends automobile insurance requirements for parents volunteering to drive participants on field trips (usually \$100,000/\$300/000, \$50,000)

- ◆ Director of Facilities
 - Assures lead paint and asbestos is remediated from the premises prior to the onset of operations
 - Assures key building services, heat, electric, telephone are serviced on a scheduled program
 - Performs a quarterly inspection of the property
 - Assists the Director in budgeting capital improvements to the facility

Administration

- The center's state license is never allowed to expire
- The administrators continually seek current information from recognized authorities on relevant child health, safety and welfare practices
- Staff seek out professional development opportunities on health and safety issues
- Staff are sensitive and responsive to each child's
 - Risk taking behavior
 - Immunization profile
 - Specific medical needs
 - Cultural differences
- The center applies for assessment and certification from the National Childcare Accreditation Council
- There are always at least two care-givers on the premises while a child is present
- A guidebook is published for parents outlining
 - ◆ Health requirements for children
 - vaccinations
 - communication of allergies
 - known disabilities
 - ◆ Types of unacceptable behavior that could result in displacement
- Discipline is developmentally appropriate positive methods that encourage self-control, self-direction, self-esteem and cooperation
- Equipment is clean, in good repair and safe
- Equipment is easily assessable for the age group to avoid reaching for overhead items

- Cots are provided for naptime. Each child provides personal bedding. Cots are so arranged to prevent blocking of egress paths and doors
- Each infant is assigned a personal crib, not to be shared with another
- Cooking on-site limited to toasting in an area away from the normal play area
- Students bring their own snacks and lunch
- Participation agreements include:
 - ◆ Child Health Form completed by a physician, with immunization records
 - ◆ Emergency Medical Care Permission Form
 - ◆ Child Escort Information for individuals who will pick-up the child
 - ◆ Program Permission Forms for Field Trips
 - ◆ Permission Form for Medication AdministrationAll signed by a parent.

- The center prepares and publishes an emergency management plan including:
 - ◆ Emergency evacuation and drills
 - ◆ Inclement weather plan (closure)
 - ◆ Lost child response and search
- Staff training includes: Emergency evacuation and drills
 - ◆ Health, safety and welfare responsibilities
 - ◆ Emergency response and evacuation
 - ◆ Disaster plan
 - ◆ Hazards in the workplace
 - ◆ Back and material handling procedures
 - ◆ Managing stress
 - ◆ Adult immunizations
 - ◆ Bloodborne pathogens
 - ◆ How to report safety and health concerns

Early Childhood Learning Facilities

- Prior to siting a new early childhood learning center the structure and outdoor property is inspected and tested for contamination, lead paint, asbestos, radon, etc.
- Asbestos, lead paint, radon, mold and mildew are remediated prior to building renovations (or an alternative site is selected)
- Learn and play areas inside and outside are segregated by age group
- Only materials and toys appropriate for the respective age groups as specified by Consumer Product Safety Commission guidelines, are purchased.
- Cribs meet 2011 by Consumer Product Safety Commission design guidelines.
- Schools that find it necessary to financially support a contracted center, contribute financially rather procure materials on behalf of the center (Avoid getting involved in chain of material distribution.)
- Sanitation facilities for storage of soiled diapers are protected from child access
- Automatic water sprinkler protection of the building is supplemented by smoke and fire detection with remote alarm to Public Safety or the local fire department and a local building alarm
- Early childhood learning facilities are situated on the first ground floor facilitating evacuation
- Unused electrical outlets are protected from probing fingers
- Window shade cords are cut back as short as practical

Transportation

- Only pre-qualified bus service providers are contracted for field trips. Certificates of automobile liability insurance are on file in the business office.

- Volunteers transporting locally in their personal vehicles provide evidence of insurance, \$100,000/\$300,000/\$50,000 and uninsured/under insured coverage.

- No child rides in the front seat

- All children wear seat belts, no doubling up or approved car seat with a buckled harness

- Field trips do not exceed one hour drive time

Outdoor Playgrounds

- Design, construction and equipment selection and maintenance conform to state law applicable to playground equipment.
- Unless state laws applied, Consumer Product Safety Commission standards, Handbook for Public Playground Safety, Pub. No. 325 guidelines are adopted for construction and maintenance.
- Signs are posted near the playground designating the applicable age group, 2 –5 years or 5 to 12 years
- Signs suggest supervision be present quarterly
- Early childhood learning play areas are inspected daily.
- The inspection is documented using an appropriate checklist for the equipment provided
- Fencing surrounding the area should be sufficiently distant from the equipment
- A playground maintenance manual is published including:
 - ◆ Who is responsible for inspections and repairs
 - ◆ Qualifications of the inspector
 - ◆ Frequency of the inspections
 - ◆ Procedures for reporting work, repairs and removing apparatus from use
 - ◆ Procedures for modifying apparatus
 - ◆ Procedures for budget repairs and equipment replacement
- When siting a new playground, the soil is tested for contamination

Performance Measurement

- Buildings and equipment are safe
- Potentially dangerous products, plants and objects are not accessible by children
 - ◆ Medications
 - ◆ Cleaning products
 - ◆ Garden products
 - ◆ Pest control treatments and devices
 - ◆ Sharp utensils
 - ◆ Soiled diapers and clothing
- A systematic procedure for checking the safety of buildings, grounds and equipment has been adopted
- Power points that are accessible to children have protective caps
- Power cords and curtain draw strings are secured out of the reach of children
- Hazards arising from inadequate maintenance are not acceptable
- Climbing equipment, swings or large pieces of equipment/furniture are securely anchored and have stable bases
- Infants and toddler toys do not detachable parts that are smaller than a film canister
- Staff clear tables throughout the day and sweep floors after each meal
- A safe level area is available for toys on wheels
- Each morning the facility is checked for dangerous objects and other hazards
- The center seeks advice from parents about the safety of the facility
- Medications, detergents, cleaning products, and garden chemicals are clearly marked and stored behind labeled and locked doors
- Diaper storage areas are covered
- Plants are identified and poisonous plants are removed and destroyed

Appendix

- National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
http://rin.buffalo.edu/s_huma/soci/agen-n/necpa.html

- National Child Care Association
<http://www.nccanet.org/issuesalert.html>

- Planning a Play Area for Children, National Program for Playground Safety,
University of Northern Iowa
<http://uni.edu/playground/tips/general/planning.html>

- Daycare Safety Hazards, Creighton University, EH&S
<http://www.creighton.edu/EHS/day-care.htm>

- Daycare Safety Checklist, Womens Forum.com
<http://www.childfun.com/safety/daycarelist.shtml>

- Child Care Safety Checklist, Consumer Product Safety Commission
<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/chldcare.html>

- Age - Appropriate Design Guidelines for Playgrounds,
National Program for Playground Safety, University of Northern Iowa
http://uni.edu/playground/tips/SAFE/ageappr_guidelines.html

- Inventory, Audit, and Inspection, A Layered Approach to Playground Safety,
Scott Payne, North Carolina State University
http://www2.ncsu.edu/ncsu/forest_resources/recresource/playsafe.html

- Fall Surfacing Guidelines for Playgrounds, National Program for Playground Safety, University of Northern Iowa
http://uni.edu/playground/tips/SAFE/fallsurf_guidelines.html

- Developing a Playground Safety Maintenance Program,
National Program for Playground Safety, University of Northern Iowa
http://uni.edu/playground/tips/SAFE/fallsurf_guidelines.html