SACERS Technical Assistance Papers
Paper #2: Health and Safety in School Age Care

Health and Safety – Top Priorities for School Age Programs

The First Step: Creating Safe, Healthy Environments. Keeping school age children safe and healthy during out-of-school hours is a top priority for school age programs. This requires designing the program environment to promote health and safety and using effective strategies for maintaining a safe, healthy, hygienic environment. Creating safe, healthy environments requires giving careful attention to setting up the environment to help children develop safety awareness and learn and use healthy habits as they participate in the program.

Monitoring Environments for Safety and Health Hazards. School age program environments should be checked daily to ensure they are, clean, uncluttered and free from hazards. It is important for staff to conduct regular safety and health checks and to monitor the environment throughout the program hours to ensure the environments remains in a safe, hygienic condition. Bacteria, viruses, and parasites can be deposited on program tables, equipment and materials when children with a contagious condition sneeze, cough, bleed, vomit, or touch things. Some diseases can be spread before a child shows any symptoms. Periodic disinfecting of the program environment helps prevent the spread of disease. It is essential to recognize that promoting and protecting children's health and safety is a primary responsibility of staff in school age programs throughout the day.

Helping Children Develop Habits to Stay Safe and Healthy. Because school age children are growing towards independence, it is important to provide an environment that encourages them to develop habits and behaviors that will keep them healthy and safe from harm as they participate in program experiences. School age children can be involved in creating and maintaining a safe, hygienic environment. This helps children develop an awareness of potential safety and health hazards and encourages them to observe health and safety rules and guidelines.

Ensuring Children's Safety and Health at Arrival and Dismissal

Managing Arrival. To ensure children's safety in the program, it is important to establish procedures and routines that help children make a smooth transition from home or school. When children walk through the door, they need to know what is expected and how to get engaged in the program. The environment should be designed to help children store their belongings, connect with staff and friends, and become involved in an appropriate program activity. Here are some strategies to consider:
- Designate specific spaces (cubbies, baskets, shelves, hooks, folding chairs, etc.) for each child to place his/her belongings.
- To meet children's varying needs, provide children with several daily transition activity choices about where to go and what to do on arrival. Choices might include: 1) Go to the snack area for self service snack and conversation with friends or a staff member, 2) Meet a friend in the Comfort Zone to talk or play a quiet game, 3) Join a group of children and staff member for free play outdoors or in the gym, 4) Go to the Library Corner to

start on homework or relax with a book or magazine. Provide a designated amount of time for children to participate in one or more of these choices. Build in opportunities for hand washing as needed.

- After transition activities, schedule a brief "What's Happening Today" meeting to announce the day's activity options, solicit children's ideas and questions, and give children directions on how to get involved with different activities.

Establishing Procedures for Tracking Attendance. It is critical for staff to develop effective procedures for tracking attendance of all children and recording and reporting unexplained absences to parents. One effective attendance taking method is for designated staff members to maintain a clip board of children's names and silently record children's presence as they arrive. This avoids the need to gather everyone in a group for an attendance taking activity. In large programs, each staff member might be responsible for tracking the attendance of 12 to 15 children. Children can be asked to check in with one staff member in a specific program location on arrival. When the attendance check is complete, each staff member can submit attendance sheets to a coordinating supervisor.

Observing Children's Health on Arrival. Staff can help prevent the spread of disease by conducting daily health checks. When children arrive at the program each day, it is important for staff to observe whether or not children are exhibiting any signs of contagious disease. Staff can also reduce the spread of disease by looking for signs of illness as they interact with children throughout the program hours. It is important to inform parents when children are ill when they arrive or when they become ill during the program. Provide a secluded, comfortable area where ill children can rest until parents arrive. See chart: General Signs and Symptoms of Contagious Diseases.

General Signs and Symptoms of Contagious Diseases*

Be alert for the following symptoms when taking attendance and greeting children:

- ✔ difficulty breathing
- ✔ yellowish skin or eyes
- ✔ unusual spots or rashes
- ✔ feverish appearance
- ✔ severe coughing (red or blue in the face, high-pitched croup or whooping sound)
- ✔ pinkeye (tears, redness of eyelid lining, irritation, swelling, discharge of pus)
- ✔ infected skin patches or crusty, bright-yellow, dry, or gummy skin areas
- ✔ unusual behavior (child is cranky, less active than usual, or more irritable than usual; child feels general discomfort or just seems unwell)

Be alert for other signs that signify illness during the program's operation:

- ✔ frequent trips to the bathroom
- ✔ complaints about difficulties going to the bathroom
- ✔ sore throat or trouble swallowing
- ✔ headache or stiff neck
- ✔ nausea and vomiting
- ✔ loss of appetite
- ✔ frequent scratching of the body or scalp

*Excerpted from Koralek, D., Newman, R., and Colker, L. *Caring for Children in School-Age Programs, Volume 1, Module 2, Healthy.* Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc., 1995.

Ensuring a Safe Dismissal. It is essential for school age programs to develop dismissal policies and procedures that ensure children's safety as they leave the program and make the transition back to home. Effective dismissal policies and procedures are systematic and include strategies that address the following issues:

- Children are released only to authorized persons. The program maintains a list of authorized persons, including emergency contacts for each child and any required legal documentation. Sign out procedures provide a record of when and to whom children are released.
- Children are prepared for a safe dismissal. Staff help children conclude and clean up activities safely in advance of dismissal. Staff provide help and support as needed as children gather their belongings.
- All entrances and exits are secure. Procedures are established for monitoring entrances and exits to ensure children do not leave without authorization and that strangers do not have access to removing children from the premises.
- Parents are informed about children's health and/or injury issues. Programs communicate with parents in a timely manner about any health and/or injury issues. Appropriate documentation is maintained for any health or injury incidents.

Preparing and Maintaining SAFE Indoor and Outdoor Environments

Assessing Safety Risks. The first step in preparing safe indoor and outdoor environments for school age programs is to assess the potential risks. Risks may be associated with the developmental characteristics of school age children as well as risks inherent in the environment.

School age children are active and busy. They are developing many new physical capacities and they often take risks in their excitement about trying out new physical skills and capabilities. They are also developing competences and skills in other areas, are exploring new relationships, and are growing towards independence. Each of these developmental tasks presents unique risks and challenges. As children become more confident, they sometimes try to do things on their own before they are ready or able to do so or make poor decisions about the best way to approach a challenge. For some children, the risk-taking tendencies associated with the school age years become heightened by temperaments that cause them to act impulsively without thinking things through. When this happens, children forget to think about safety.

In addition to risks associated with developmental characteristics of school age children, there are also risks inherent in the program environment. The diverse activities and experiences in school age programs incorporate the use of many materials that may be messy or scattered without proper care and clean up. Program equipment that experiences heavy use may become unsafe if parts are broken, weakened, or missing. Facilities themselves may become hazardous if boundaries are not established or if floors, doors, windows, large equipment, playing fields and other areas are not maintained properly. By designing and maintaining an environment that is free from obstacles and hazards, staff can help children move about safely and prevent accidents.

General Rules and Guidelines for Establishing SAFE Environments. School age programs can prevent accidents and minimize safety risks by addressing the following areas when setting up the program environment:

- Position furniture, equipment, and materials with care.
    - Secure furniture so that it cannot fall over. Avoid the use of tall furniture.
    - Place furniture so that staff can observe all children as they work and play.
    - Use furniture with open shelving; do not use furniture with heavy lids that could fall on children.
    - Store heavy items on the bottom shelves of storage units, book cases, or shelving units.
- Arrange furniture and equipment so that children can move safely and easily throughout the program.
- Designate separate areas for different types of activities in both the indoor and outdoor environments. Avoid potential conflicts and accidents by separating noisy and quiet areas and separating areas reserved for active and passive activities.

- Use boundary markers to indicate safe zones for active play – indoors and outdoors. Locate outdoor ball games away from the street.
- Inspect all equipment to ensure that safety equipment (such as fire-extinguishers) is functional and other equipment (E.g. appliances, electrical cords) are in good condition.
- Establish safety procedures and safe zones for activities using potentially hazardous materials or equipment (e.g. cooking appliances, melting wax, wood-working tools).
- Examine materials and equipment to ensure they comply with safety and fire regulations (E.g. non-flammable, non-toxic, splinter-free, etc.).
- Store hazardous materials in secure, safe locations.
- Locate activity areas needing electricity or water near sources of supply.
- Supply areas with messy activities with newspapers, drop cloths or towels to control spills.
- Develop Daily and Monthly Safety Checks to Minimize Safety Risks. See chart: Sample Safety Checklist Items for the Environment.

Sample SAFETY Checklist Items for the Environment*

Create a Safety Checklist for your program. Review the list below to help generate a checklist that reflects your program facilities, activities, and participating children. Add other items that are unique to your program.

Check Daily:

- ✓ Room is free of clutter
- ✓ Tables and chairs are in good repair
- ✓ Furniture is free of sharp edges and splinters.
- ✓ Storage units are stable and secured; drawers and doors are closed.
- ✓ Extension cords are not used near water or placed where someone might trip over them.
- ✓ Steps, platforms, and lofts have padding underneath and protective railings.
- ✓ No highly flammable furnishings or decorations are present.
- ✓ Each area has enough space for children to work and play safely.
- ✓ Hazardous chemical and equipment (E.g. woodworking tools, specialized knives), cleaning materials, and other dangerous substances are stored only in locked cabinets and are not used by children without adult supervision.
- ✓ Floors are dry.
- ✓ Rugs are in place and securely fastened.
- ✓ Exit doors are clearly marked and free of clutter.
- ✓ Exit signs are in working order.

Check Monthly:

- ✓ Blocks and other wooden items are smooth and splinter-free.
- ✓ Moving parts (wheels, knobs) are securely fastened and working properly.
- ✓ Scissors and knives used by children are sharp enough to cut easily.
- ✓ Hinges, screws, and bolts on furniture and equipment are securely fastened.
- ✓ The smoke detector is working properly and the fire extinguishers are properly located and fully charged.
- ✓ Electrical wires are not frayed.
- ✓ Radiators and hot water pipes are covered or insulated.
- ✓ First Aid Kit is stocked with required items and stored securely.
- ✓ Evacuation procedures are established and posted.
- ✓ Emergency policies and procedures are up to date and observed.
- ✓ Fire Drill routes are established and drills conducted as required.

***Excerpted and adapted from D. Koralek, R. Newman, and L. Colker. *Caring for Children in School-Age Programs, Volume 1, Module 2, Healthy.* Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc., 1995. Pages 45- 48.

SACERS Technical Assistance Papers
Paper #2: Health and Safety in School Age Care
Using Effective Supervisory Practices to Keep Children SAFE Indoors and Outdoors

Children learn a great deal about how to stay safe by observing adults. Acting as a positive role model of safety is an important responsibility of school age staff. There are a number of additional things staff can do to involve children in creating and maintaining a safe environment.[1]

1. <u>Involve Children in Creating Safety Rules</u>. School age children are capable of analyzing and reflecting on how to keep themselves safe. They can identify potential hazards and problems in the environment and those associated with program activities. They can use language to describe the hazards and develop rules to prevent accidents. As they grow towards independence, school age children are much more likely to follow rules they have helped to establish.

2. <u>Plan Program Schedules Paced to Meet Children's Needs.</u> Create a schedule that provides a balance of opportunities for activity, rest, and relaxation. Tired, over-excited, and over-stimulated children are more likely to have accidents.

3. <u>Teach Children Strategies to Help Them Monitor Their Behavior and Stay Safe.</u> Children can learn to give themselves brief reminders to help them stay calm if they become angry or frustrated (E.g. *"Calm down." "Slow down." "Count to 10 before you do anything." "Take it easy." "Take a break."*
   - Remember that individual differences among school age children impact their ability to keep themselves safe.
   - Recognize that younger children generally need closer supervision than older children who may be ready for more independent activity without close adult supervision.

4. <u>Use Effective Supervisory Strategies</u>.
   - Assess risks for indoor and outdoor activities; determine and mark appropriate boundaries for activities.
   - Assess the level of supervision required. Implement the appropriate level. In an article on supervision of children in school age programs, Diane Barber described three levels of supervision that can be implemented for different types of activities and situations.[2]

     Concentrated supervision - staff is directly involved in the activity due to the complexity of materials, equipment, and tools.
     Focused supervision - staff is within close visual and hearing ranges of two or three different activities: is

---

[1] List excerpted from SD Department of Social Services, Office of Child Care Services and Roberta L. Newman. School-Age Certificate Training: Module 13 – *Creating and Maintaining Safe School-Age Environments.* Pierre, SD, 2004. Page 18.
[2] *Too much of a good thing: Tips for working with large groups of schoolagers* by Diane Barber. Published by Southeastern Pennsylvania SACC Project.

available for children to ask questions; and may facilitate discussion.

Monitoring - staff is centrally positioned within visual and hearing range of activities. Staff's attention is focused on the overall safety and supervision of the children.

- Work with colleagues to develop a supervisory plan that ensures all program areas are supervised appropriately.
- Discuss limits, guidelines, and rules before having children participate in a new activity or game.
- Limit the number of children who may participate in activities at one time if necessary to maintain safe conditions.
- Help children remember and observe safety rules with frequent reminders as they participate in program experiences.
- Stay engaged with children during program activities.

5. Invite Community Safety Representatives to Present Safety Programs.

Preparing and Maintaining HEALTHY Indoor and Outdoor Environments

Determining Health Risks. Health risks in school age programs can be associated with children's development as well as with the program environment. As school age children grow and develop, their bodies are changing rapidly. The period of growth as children approach adolescence is the most rapid period of growth since infancy. Children's healthy development is at risk when they do not exercise regularly and eat nutritious snacks and meals. As children grow, it is increasingly important for them to learn and maintain hygienic routines and healthy living habits that help them develop a healthy, balanced lifestyle. Children who do not develop habits for healthy living are at risk for obesity, substance abuse, contracting contagious diseases, developing diabetes, and more.

In addition to health risks associated with growth and development, the program environment also presents risks for children. When large numbers of children gather together and use facilities and equipment, the potential for spreading germs escalates. Programs can minimize health risks inherent in the environment by maintaining a clean, hygienic environment, involving children in health education activities, and engaging children in routines like proper hand washing that helps children keep themselves clean and healthy.

General Guidelines for Establishing HEALTHY, HYGIENIC Environments. School age programs can do the following things to create and maintain a hygienic program environment that helps children stay healthy.[3]

- Set up and maintain a well-organized environment. Keep surfaces free of clutter for easy cleaning.

---

[3] Adapted from SD Department of Social Services, Office of Child Care Services and Roberta L. Newman. School-Age Certificate Training: Module 14 – *Creating and Maintaining Healthy School-Age Environments.* Pierre, SD, 2004. Page 38.

- – Disinfect program materials and equipment often (at least once a week for regularly used areas, daily for food service areas). Wash areas first with soap and water and rinse. Then, use a bleach solution to disinfect (1/4 cup bleach to 1 gallon of water or 1 Tablespoon of bleach to 1 quart of water). In addition to table tops, use the solution for counters, sinks, toilets, door knobs, door frames, and as a dipping solution when mops or brooms are used to wipe up body fluids. Be sure to allow areas treated with the solution to air dry. Prepare fresh cleaning solution daily.
- – Keep bathroom areas stocked with toilet paper, soap, and paper towels. Provide tissue boxes throughout the program to prevent the spread of germs.
- Establish Routines to Maintain a Healthy Environment. Examples:
  - – Engage children in helping to maintain a hygienic environment.
  - – Handle and store food properly. Date, label, and store food to protect against spoilage.
  - – Dispose of garbage appropriately.
  - – Rinse brooms, dustpans, mops, and rags in bleach solution after cleaning up body fluids.
  - – Ensure that staff and children use proper hand washing procedures.
  - – Observe children carefully to identify children who may be ill.
  - – Provide a flexible schedule that meets children's varying needs for activity and rest.
- Conduct Daily Health and Hygiene Checks. See chart: Sample Health and Hygiene Checklist Items for the Environment.

**Sample Health and Hygiene Checklist Items
for the Environment**

Create a Health and Hygiene Checklist for your program. Use the list below to help generate a list that reflects your program facilities, activities, and participating children. Add other items as needed (e.g. handling of toothbrushes if you provide full day service).

- ✓ Activity areas are clean and free of clutter and hazardous materials.
- ✓ Staff conduct daily health checks as children arrive.
- ✓ Fresh air is available daily.
- ✓ Water is available to children throughout the day.
- ✓ Shade is available when children play outdoors.
- ✓ Sunscreen is available to protect children during hot weather months.
- ✓ Children help wipe off tables used for eating and messy activities.
- ✓ Food is dated, labeled, and stored to prevent spoilage.
- ✓ Garbage is stored in metal or plastic containers with lids; containers are lined with plastic bags and emptied daily.
- ✓ Tissues, paper towels, and soap are accessible to children.
- ✓ Bathroom is clean and well stocked with toilet paper, soap, and paper towels.
- ✓ Schedule is flexible and meets children's needs to eat, rest, and get exercise.
- ✓ Procedures are established and followed to notify parents and request pick up when children are ill.
- ✓ Medical/allergy information about children is posted or stored according to regulations.
- ✓ If younger children are served, sheets and blankets are laundered daily.
- ✓ Fresh bleach solution is made daily.
- ✓ Facilities, equipment, toys, and other objects used by children are washed and disinfected weekly.
- ✓ Brooms, dustpans, mops, and rags are rinsed in bleach solution after cleaning body fluid spills.
- ✓ Routines are established to maintain a healthy environment (E.g. Staff and children follow proper hand washing guidelines. SEE BOX: Hand Washing Guidelines).

Hand Washing Guidelines
(Recommended by the Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, Georgia)

Use this list to create posters for bathrooms and sink areas OR display hand washing posters produced by local or state health agencies.

Steps for proper hand washing…..

1. Use soap and running water.
2. Rub your hands vigorously as you wash them.
3. Wash all surfaces: backs of hands, wrists, between fingers, under fingernails; spend at least 30 seconds washing.
4. Rinse your hands well. Leave the water running.
5. Dry your hands with a paper towel.
6. Turn off the water using a paper towel instead of bare hands.

Staff should wash hands….

- before the first child arrives
- before preparing or handling food
- before and after handling body secretions (wiping your nose, caring for a child who is vomiting, helping stop a nose bleed, cleaning a wound)
- before and after administering medication to a child
- after helping a child who may have a contagious condition
- after using the bathroom

Children should wash hands….

- when they come into the program each day
- before and after preparing or serving food
- before and after eating
- after a nose bleed
- after vomiting
- after handling animals
- after touching a child who may have a contagious condition
- before participating in water play, using play dough, or other program materials that may transmit germs
- after playing or working outdoors

- Help Children Develop Habits to Stay Healthy. Teach children strategies for keeping themselves healthy. In his book, *Get Balance,* Pediatrician Craig B. Liden, MD, stresses that healthy habits involve eating well, staying active, getting rest, being centered, and taking responsibility for one's health and fitness.[4] Listed below are examples of ways school age programs can provide children with many opportunities to learn and practice life skills and habits that support a healthy life style.
    - Provide nutritious snacks and meals and encourage children to eat healthy. NOTE: According to the PA Position Statements for the SACERS, foods served at meal/snack must meet at least 50% of the meal/snack component requirements of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) or United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Foods served at meal/snack must meet all nutritional components of CACFP or USDA. For free copies of the USDA recommended food pyramid for children and other nutrition guidelines, visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) web site at www.MyPyramid.gov.
    - Provide opportunities for daily vigorous exercise and outdoor play.
    - Provide opportunities for children to center themselves and relax their bodies while their minds stay focused (e.g. reading or listening to others read, listening to quiet music, balancing as they move to slow music, etc.)
    - Provide opportunities for children to rest and pace themselves after active work and play.
    - Help children develop personal hygiene habits and lifestyle choices that help take responsibility for staying healthy.

---

[4] C. B. Liden, M.D. *Get Balance: The Guide to Living a Balanced, Healthy Lifestyle.* Pittsburgh, PA: Transhealth, Inc., 2001.

Suggested Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics. Elk Grove Village, IL: *First Aid Guidelines, 1995.*
American Society for Testing and Materials. *ASTM Consumer Safety Performance Specifications for Playground Equipment for Public Use,* ASTM F1487-98. West Conshohocken, PA: American Society for Testing and Materials, 1998.
Carlson, G. *Make Sure Children Exercise* (National Network for Child Care), 1994. Printed in Todd, C.M. (Ed.). Family Child Care Connections, 4(3), pp 6-7. Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service.
Handbook for Public Safety, Pub. No. 325. Washington, DC: Consumer Product Safety Commission, 1997.
Harms, Thelma; Jacobs, Ellen Vineberg; White, Donna Romano. *School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (Space and Furnishings and Health and Safety).* New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1996.
Koralek, Derry G.; Newman, Roberta L.; Colker, Laura J. *Caring for Children in School-Age Programs (Module 1 Safe* and *Module 2 Healthy),* 2nd Edition. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, 2000.
Liden, Craig B., M.D. *Get Balance! The Guide to Living a Balanced Healthy Lifestyle.* Pittsburgh, PA: Transhealth, Inc., 2001.
Newman, Roberta L. and SD Department of Social Services, Office of Child Care Services. School-Age Certificate Modules: *Creating and Maintaining Safe School-Age Environments* and *Creating and Maintaining Healthy School-Age Environments.* Pierre, SD, 2004. Modules available in Professional Development Institutes from PA Keystone Stars.
Sokal-Gutierrez, M.D. *Caring for Our Children, National Health and Safety Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs,* 2nd Edition. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association and Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000.
USDA Web site: wwwMyPyramid.gov. Provides recommended food pyramid for children.