

Preventing Abuse—By Design

Your facility's design and physical layout can help reduce the risk of child abuse. Various organizations, like the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend that you arrange your facility's physical layout so that all areas can be viewed by at least one other adult, in addition to the caregiver, at all times when children are in your care. This reduces the risk of abuse by reducing the time individual caregivers are in isolation with children, especially in areas where children may be partially or fully undressed.

It also provides clear opportunity for witnesses to give accurate accounts of daily interactions, in the event of an abuse allegation. With multiple caregivers observing each other's activities, the risk of behaviors resulting in physical or sexual abuse can be greatly reduced.

Other recommendations to reduce abuse allegations include:

- **Screen applicants thoroughly.** Screen all staff members, including volunteers and temporary substitutes. Screening should include a comprehensive application requesting references and past employment history. Conduct a face-to-face interview that allows you to assess responses to open-ended questions regarding an applicant's position on discipline, why they are interested in the position and what kind of supervisory environment they prefer.
- **Check references.** Don't rely on references from friends or former co-workers of applicants. Ask the applicant to provide the names of people who have directly supervised and observed their work.
- **Check criminal records.** Best results can be achieved by doing both a name check through a commercial background check firm and a fingerprint check through the F.B.I. If you have an applicant that has moved frequently, ask why. Depending on your comfort level with their answer, you may want to consider researching their background in more depth. To get discounted background checks for all your employees and volunteers, go to www.childcareinsurance.com and click the Background Checks button.
- **Establish policies to protect children.** Prohibit or limit staff members from being alone with a child, especially where they may be out of view of other adults. Review your policy frequently with staff and make changes to improve it, if necessary. Keep a record of these reviews in staff personnel files, with their signatures validating they received this information.
- **Train staff.** Your staff should have a clear understanding of what conduct is appropriate and what is inappropriate. Your training needs to include both how to recognize and how to report suspected abuse. Again, document this training.

For additional information regarding child abuse recognition and reporting, you can contact the Nonprofit Risk Management Center at www.nonprofitrisk.org, or access Markel's web site at www.childcare.com and download a copy of *Child Abuse: Identification, Reporting, and Prevention*.

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.