

COURSE # 7 SAFETY & EMERGENCY PROCEDURES FOR CHILDREN (Lecture Notes)

If you work with children, you think SAFETY! Safety and Protection is the responsibility of every person in children's ministry. It is imperative that churches develop safety guidelines and security policies to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which they can participate in fun and spiritual activities. No church should run children's programs if these safety policies are not in place.

Types of Emergencies

Children are generally active, energetic, and full of life. They are enthusiastic and eager to learn and explore. When they are involved in activities whether indoor or outdoor, it is inevitable that they can skin their knees or hurt a finger. There are many types of emergencies that children's leaders need to be aware of.

- * **Fire** – this may happen in a tent during an overnight camp outdoors; a dormitory or campsite caught fire
- * **Fractures, cuts and bruises** – from falls, hiking, active games or rough play
- * **Food poisoning** – contaminated food purchased or prepared by members, parents, etc.
- * **Accidents** – the bus turned over, cars that carry students collided, etc.
- * **Drowning** – swimming activities that lacked sufficient adult supervision
- * **Molestation and abuse** – can be physical, emotional or sexual abuse

General Tips for Emergency

Every church that runs children's programs need to do the following:

- Develop guidelines for protecting children and the church – form a community and write out guidelines in the area of staffing, volunteer screening, illness, off-site activities, etc. Once accepted by the church and approved for use, it is vital that they be implemented.
- Develop a crisis management plan – this should include:
 - * a fire evacuation plan; proper fire drill for children
 - * a communication network for informing parents and church leaders
 - * designate individuals to deal with media
 - * a referral file of community and church resources

More Emergency Tips

- Keep children in groups with adult supervision. Depending on the age of the group, the number of adults to the number of children should be written out carefully. In general, for kindergarten children, a good ratio is 1 adult to 5 children. For primary children, 1 adult to 8 children. This ratio is also dependent on whether it is an outdoor, off-campus activity or just within the church compound.

- Provide ongoing training for local church staff and volunteers and raise awareness of the importance child protection and safety policies.
- Provide awareness training for the children – teach them how to be alert to strangers, about unacceptable touch by others, how to play safely, etc.
- Verify insurance coverage with your local conference for high risk activities

More General Tips

- Ensure access to public telephones and the numbers of emergency services around the area where the activity is going to take place.
- Have access to parents. Phone number, cell number, or pager must be available for communication with the parents.
- Health information about each child should be available on hand.

Tip 1: Outings/Fieldtrips

- Conduct safety walks through your church or designated activity venues to identify potential hazards
 - * go to the place where you will be holding your program and check it out first before the event takes place
 - * look out for water areas, wet floors, loose handrails, etc. Get that fixed up and determine a safe place for play if it is near the water.
 - * Is there a busy street beside the venue chosen for the program? Are there gates that could be locked?
- Use only qualified drivers who not only have a valid driver's license, but a good record of safe driving.
- When you are transporting children in your vehicle, it is important that you do not speed.
- Buckle up whenever possible and proper instructions must be given to children to sit down in buses, vans, etc.

Outings/Fieldtrips

- Install a “buddy” system for swimming activities. This is essential that no child swims alone. A buddy should always be there to help alert danger and call for help when it is needed.
 - * pair the children by twos for activities in water
 - * give strict instructions to children to stay together. If violated, they will have to leave the water.
 - * have many volunteers to help to supervise the children – parents make excellent volunteers for fieldtrips and outdoor activities. Recruit them to help out on such events for they can also keep an eye on their own child.

Tip 2: Food and Water Safety

- Practice good hygiene in food preparation – be sure your caterers or individuals who are going to prepare food for the children practice personal hygiene, such as washing their hands before preparing the food or after using the bathroom. Food gloves should be used when handling cooked food and hair nets be worn to prevent hair from falling into the food.
- Ensure food is properly and promptly refrigerated in hot weather
- Beware of food allergies with younger children. Always check with parents if their child has a particular allergy. This should be listed on the parental consent form before the day of the activity.
- Ensure that the water supply is clean and safe for drinking.

Tip 3: Communication with Parents

- Require written permission forms for all off-campus activities. For high risk activities such as water sports, snow skiing, cycling, etc. specific consent is needed. No child should be allowed to participate in any such activities without receiving those consent forms on time. You just can't take the risk of holding the church liable in the event of any accident or death.
- Know how to access parents in case of an emergency. Have a list of their telephone, cell phone, and pager numbers in your folder so that they can be reached immediately.
- Encourage parents to provide appropriate information about safety and sexuality to their children. It is wise to have them

Tip 4: Supervision

- Find as many volunteers as you can to supervise children. Suggested adult/child ratio is 1:5. This may be different depending on the age of the children.
- Rally the youth and teens of the church to serve as supervisors or counselors in your activities. Many of them love to be part of such fun activities. They also like to feel they can mentor the younger ones and in fact, many times these youth and teens have an impact on the younger kids.
- Get parents involved in being volunteers to help with supervision. They can also help transport the children in their vehicles which will definitely save some money for your small budget.
- Provide a code of conduct regarding kids and volunteers and also between kids. Read to them or explain that to the group before leaving on the outing.

Tip 5: Check Supplies and Equipment

- Be sure to check all the materials and supplies that will be used by the children.
 - * buy scissors that are suitable for children, such as those with rounded edges rather than the sharp one.
 - * materials should be toxic free whether they be glue, ink, play dough, etc. Read labels carefully to see if it is toxic.

- * do not use materials that are too small for young children for fear of the danger of swallowing. Young children should not be making crafts using tiny green beans, or small seeds, etc. They may swallow the beans by accident.
- Always use equipment and supplies that are age appropriate.

Equipment

- Check playground equipment before letting the children play on them.
 - * Make sure the swings and merry-go-rounds do not have loose rings or screws.
 - * Check the slides to see if the sliding panel is rough; does it have splinters? Is the slide too high for the younger ones.
 - * Try using the equipment yourself before they are used by the children.

Tip 6: Staff/Volunteers Preparation

- It is important to give your volunteers some orientation before going on the outing. It is also important to provide some simple training for them too.
 - * Provide first aid training for all staff and volunteers. This is necessary when working with children for they do get hurt or fall down.
 - * Have a well stocked first-aid kit accessible at all times.
 - * If on an outing, be sure the children know who is the First Aid person they could turn to for help. They should know where the First Aid room is located. During the night hours, the children should know the room number of the First Aid person in case they need to contact him at night.

Tip 7: Medical Personnel

- Provide a nurse on duty in all activities. This is a must for all children's activities. The children should know who this camp nurse is and where to locate her/him when needed.
- If a doctor is available, it is even much better. If one of your parents is a physician, rally his help as a volunteer doctor for your activity. This will definitely add merit to your program.

Yes, Safety is First! It is our obligation to ensure the safety of the children under our care