Childcare Worker Safety Meeting Kit

Workers in childcare facilities educate and care for infants, toddlers, and preschool age children. Childcare may not seem like a hazardous occupation, but every workplace has hazards and risks. Childcare workers should pay attention to their own safety while they nurture children.

HAZARD IDENTIFICATION/ELIMINATION

Keeping children and workers safe is a key responsibility of all childcare centres. It is simply impossible to watch all children all the time, so hazard identification and elimination becomes a key part of the strategy. Hazard identification is not something that simply can be done every quarter and then forgotten. Daily checks should be conducted of all indoor and outdoor areas. A system should be in place that ensures all hazards are reported and acted upon. To support these daily checks, there should be regular safety audits conducted as well as having food safety plans and infection control policies and procedures in place.

COMMON RISKS AND HAZARDS FOR CHILDCARE WORKERS

- Workers being required to lift, carry, or move children and/or objects.
- Workers having to work at low levels (think floor and children sized furniture)
- Tripping and slipping hazards
- Using furniture to reach high points on walls (chairs and artwork)
- The risk of communicable diseases
- Work stress
- Harassment and bullying

COMPREHENSIVE HAZARD IDENTIFICATION CHECKLIST

Hazards are present in many different forms. Armed with a simple checklist, childcare workers can look at the childcare centre and identify any potential hazards that could cause harm to children or workers.

Things to critically examine include:

- Floors – particularly split-level areas with steps,
- Ladders – are they properly maintained and used where appropriate
- Slippery surfaces,
- Processes that involve lifting, carrying, or working at low levels
- Processes that involve moving objects – have people been trained to take the appropriate steps?

Mechanical or electrical risks can be caused by any piece of machinery, equipment, or kitchen appliance. Besides representing mechanical hazards, there is also some risk of fire if items are not properly maintained. Things to look for include:

- frayed power cords
- unplugged power points

Chemical risks can be present in substances that contain acids, poisons, or aggressive cleaning agents. Risks from exposure or improper use include fire and poisoning. Things to look for:

- Chemical bottles or containers stored within reach of children.

Biological risks include such nasties as bacteria, viruses, mould, and vermin. Where these things are present there are risks of cross-contamination and food poisoning. Things to look for:

- Evidence of vermin (droppings)
- Dampness on walls or ceilings
- Broken insect screens

- Psychosocial risks can be evidenced by such things as workplace stress, bullying and harassment.

FINAL WORD

Keeping workers and children safe is the responsibility of all childcare facilities. Childcare workers from the outside may not appear to encounter hazardous situations, but there is more than meets the eye. There are many dangerous and hazardous risks for workers and children in childcare operations.