Evacuations and Shelter-in-Place: Training Staff for Calm and Order Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

In childcare, emergencies can happen suddenly, and how staff respond in those first moments makes a critical difference. Whether it’s an evacuation or shelter in place, children rely entirely on adults to guide them safely through situations they may not understand. When there is confusion or hesitation, risk increases quickly.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Disorganized Movement and Panic

When instructions are unclear or delayed, children may become confused, move unpredictably, or panic, increasing the risk of trips, falls, or being left behind.

Breakdown in Supervision and Accountability

In fast-moving situations, children can become separated from the group if roles and headcounts are not maintained, leading to missing children or delayed response.

Environmental and Hazard Exposure

Depending on the emergency, children may be exposed to hazards such as fire, smoke, severe weather, or unsafe individuals, which can result in burns, breathing issues, impact injuries, or other harm.

Note: If staff are unsure of procedures or hesitate, response time increases, which can worsen outcomes and increase the severity of injuries or risk to children and staff.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

When it comes to evacuations or shelter-in-place situations, the goal is simple: stay calm, stay organized, and move with purpose.

Be Prepared Before Anything Happens

This is not something you figure out in the moment. Know your procedures, your exits, your safe areas, and your role. When everyone knows what to do ahead of time, the response becomes faster and more controlled.

Stay Calm and Take the Lead

Your behavior matters. Speak clearly, keep your movements steady, and avoid showing panic. Even if the situation is serious, staying calm helps children feel safe and follow instructions.

Communicate Clearly

Give simple, direct instructions. Children don’t need a lot of information, they need clear direction. Keep it calm, short, and easy to follow.

Keep Children Together and Accounted For

Always know how many children you have and where they are.

- Do headcounts before, during, and after movement
- Keep children in sight and close together
- Never assume someone else is watching

Move with Control, Not Speed

It’s not about rushing, it’s about moving safely. Guide children, don’t push them. Watch for obstacles, hazards, and anything that could cause trips or falls along the way.

Be Ready to Adjust

Things don’t always go as planned. If something changes, respond quickly and follow your procedures. Trust your training and don’t hesitate to act.

What to Do If a Child Is Missing

If a child is unaccounted for, act immediately. Stop movement, alert your team, and follow your emergency procedures without delay. Do not assume the child is with another group. Keep the rest of the children together and supervised while the situation is addressed and communicate clearly until the child is located.

FINAL WORD

Emergencies are unpredictable, but your response doesn’t have to be. When you stay calm, follow the plan, and keep children organized and accounted for, you turn a stressful situation into a controlled one. Preparation and consistency are what make the difference when it matters most.