Hiring for Safety: Background Checks, Reference Calls, and Screening Protocols Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

Every childcare organization is built on trust. Families trust that the people hired to work with their children will keep them safe, respectful, and well cared for. Staff also rely on their coworkers to act professionally and follow the same safety standards. That trust begins long before someone enters the classroom.

Hiring decisions directly affect child safety, workplace culture, and organizational risk. Careful screening, reference checks, and background reviews help ensure that the people joining the team are prepared to protect children and support a safe learning environment.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Unsafe hiring rarely comes from one obvious mistake. It usually happens when small gaps in the hiring process are overlooked. Shortcuts, assumptions about a candidate’s character, or inconsistent screening practices can allow risks to slip through.

Common Hiring Risks

When steps like reference checks, background screening, or thorough interviews are rushed or skipped, important information may be missed.

Incomplete Screening – Skipping reference checks, rushing interviews, or delaying background checks increases the chance of hiring someone whose behaviour or values are misaligned with child safety.

Overreliance on One Tool – A criminal record check alone does not guarantee safety. Neither does a strong interview. Safety comes from multiple layers working together.

Missed Red Flags – Patterns like unexplained job gaps, reluctance to provide references, vague answers about past roles, or dismissive attitudes toward policies may signal risk if they are not explored.

Pressure to Fill Positions – Staffing shortages can push organizations to lower standards. This is when safety is most vulnerable.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Strong hiring practices help prevent risks before they enter the workplace.

How to Hire for Safety

Safe hiring is intentional, structured, and consistent. Strong hiring practices help ensure that the people joining your team are prepared to protect children and maintain professional standards.

Start With Clear Expectations

Job postings and interviews should clearly communicate your commitment to child safety, professional boundaries, and ethical conduct.

Screen Early and Carefully

Review resumes and communications for professionalism, consistency, and transparency. Early patterns in how candidates present themselves can provide important insight.

Interview for Behaviour, Not Just Skills

Ask candidates to describe how they handled real situations involving children, families, stress, and boundaries. Listen for accountability, calm judgment, and respect for safety protocols.

Key Safety Checks During Hiring:

- Conduct thorough reference checks with past supervisors
- Complete required background and vulnerable sector checks
- Observe candidate interactions with children and staff when possible

Observe Before Final Decisions

Trial shifts or supervised observations can reveal behaviour that interviews may not show. Watch how candidates communicate, follow instructions, and interact with children.

Document Every Step

Maintain clear records of interviews, reference checks, and screening decisions. Consistent documentation helps demonstrate due diligence and protects both children and the organization.

FINAL WORD

Hiring is one of the most powerful safety controls in childcare. When you hire thoughtfully, you protect children before harm can occur. Strong screening does not create barriers. It creates safer, stronger teams.