

ABUSE CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN for *Children and Youth Programs*

Administrators must do everything possible to prevent an incident of abuse from occurring in their facility, respond promptly, cooperate fully and develop effective proactive strategies for responding when an allegation has been made. Establishing policies and procedures for responding to allegations of abuse before they occur will make it easier for the program to respond and not violate confidentiality issues. Preparing a written crisis management plan for dealing with participants, employees, children, parents, authorities and media if you have an incident of abuse is imperative.

Planning for a crisis:

1. Establish individual obligations and procedures for reporting suspected cases of abuse within the facility.
2. Facility Administrators will want to deal with the employee in a clear, calm, straightforward manner that there has been an allegation made against them.
3. Reporting Requirements:
 - a. Contact with State Child Protective Services and Local Police.
 - b. Law enforcement: Getting to know and establishing a working relationship with your local law enforcement before an allegation or incident will help you when you need them most.
 - c. Contact your Insurance Agent or Legal Counsel. They should be aware of the exact reporting requirements and can also advise administrators of the specifics involved in dealing with an accused staff member. The employee must leave the premises and should not return to work while the matter is being investigated.
 - d. Notify the child's parents. It is important that the director report the facts in a neutral manner that acknowledges the parents' understandable distress. Also point out that having reported the matter to the appropriate authorities, it is now up to others to carry out the investigation.
 - e. Notify the other parents. Notification as soon as possible decreases the likelihood of them hearing from another source. However, delay notification of other parents for a few hours to a few days to allow you to carefully think out your response and review your plan with legal counsel. Administrators should tell parents that due to confidentiality restrictions, the names of the involved children and the alleged perpetrator may not be divulged.

4. One specific person should deal with all news media. Instruct all other staff to refer any media to this person. The person chosen could be the administrator or legal counsel. However, if reporters show up with cameras at your home, the secret is to stay calm and say something pleasant. For example, the person can say that they are not surprised to see the reporter and explain briefly why you will not do the interview now and when you will be ready. Be prepared in what you will say. You should rehearse your statements because reporters will try hard to get you to say more. Remaining silent ("no comment") will only magnify the crisis and forces media to speculate and resort to less reliable sources. If you don't know the answer to a reporter's question, admit it. Do not assume reporters understand your business, explain it to them and expect whatever you say is for publication and broadcast.

5. Establish procedures on documentation of actions taken to include provisions for maintaining records and ensuring confidentiality. Responding to allegations that are not believable is more complicated than responding to those that are. Even though the director does not believe the allegations to be true, you must still follow many of the guidelines that apply when the allegations seem credible, respecting the confidentiality of all parties involved, suspending the accused employee during the investigation, and deciding about notification of the other parents.

Educators and care providers are not investigators and the official inquiry into allegations of abuse is best left to a trained investigator. Action on reports of suspected child abuse may be facilitated if the director/owner of the child care program establishes a working relationship with the child protective services agency and law enforcement agencies serving their area.

Having a crisis management plan in writing and maintaining these working relationships before an alleged occurrence are extremely important procedures and must be taken seriously. Please feel free to contact us if you are interested in additional information on this topic.



P.O. Box 63 ~ Weatogue, CT 06089 ~ Phone (888) 845-8288 Toll Free
Fax (860) 844-8274 ~ Website: www.neisinc.com