



## UNIT-4      Creating a Child Safe Environment

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Discuss the primary principles of a child safe environment
- ✓ Help protect children from a wide variety of potential dangers
- ✓ Identify possible warning signs of an unsafe childcare setting

## Unit 1

### Creating a Child Safe Environment

Children are naturally curious learners who learn by exploring and discovering their surroundings. However, their inquisitiveness and exploration can put them at risk for accidents. Adults must provide children with safe environments in which to explore environments that minimize the risk of accidents and change over time to meet their changing needs and abilities.

Because young children's physical abilities are frequently superior to their understanding and reasoning abilities, they may not fully comprehend how various objects or situations can harm them. Knowing what children are capable of as they progress through developmental stages, identifying objects or situations in the care environment that may pose a risk, and intentionally modifying the environment to minimize these risks can help you prevent many accidents as a care provider.

Follow basic childproofing safety guidelines to make your care environment and surroundings as safe as possible. Examine the care environment from the inside out to ensure that it is safe for everyone. Keep an eye on your kids while they're playing to see what might be dangerous to them. Get down on the ground or on the floor to see how the world appears to someone their size. Remove or restrict children's access to potentially harmful items. When your children are in or near water, keep an eye on them at all times. Remember that even a few inches of water can cause a child to drown. Surveillance is the most effective form of prevention. Accidents can happen in a matter of seconds. The keys to keeping children safe are prevention and supervision.

### Ways to Childproof the Care Setting

#### Procedures:

1. Take a look around the child care facility to see if there are any potential safety hazards. Get down on your hands and knees and move around each room to explore each area at a child's level. Consider what looks appealing and is within reach of a child (between the floor and about 40 inches above).
2. Secure or remove any items that could endanger a child.
3. Check for secured entrances and exits, as well as clear evacuation exits.
4. To prevent injuries, install safety devices on equipment, appliances, and furniture.

Use the following as an example:

- Cabinet and drawer safety latches and locks for kitchens, bathrooms, and other areas. Look for safety latches and locks that are simple to install and operate for adults but strong enough to withstand child pulls and tugs.
- Safety gates around stairwells and rooms where dangers may exist. Look for safety gates that are difficult to dislodge but that adults can easily open and close.
- Covers for doorknobs and door locks. Make sure the lock is strong and can be quickly opened by an adult in the event of an emergency.
- Anti-scald devices for taps and shower heads are available. To avoid scalds from hot water, set the water heater temperature to no more than 50°C, or 120°F.

### Childproofing the Care Setting

- Smoke and CO detectors on every level and in every room of the child care facility. At least once a year, check the batteries.
  - Safety netting and window guards at windows, balconies, decks, and landings. Window openings should be no more than four inches wide, including the space between the window guard bars.
  - Furniture corner and edge bumpers. Make sure to use bumpers that stay firmly in place on the furniture.
  - Outlet Plates and Covers for electrical outlets. Make sure outlet protectors are difficult for children to remove and are large enough for them not to choke on.
  - Window coverings that don't require any cords (or cords that are kept inaccessible).
  - Anchors for securing furniture and appliances to the floor or a wall (e.g., television stands, shelves, bookcases, dressers, desks, chests, and ranges).
  - Set up a 4-foot-tall fence with a self-closing, self-latching gate to completely surround a pool or water feature.
5. Check the child care environment on a daily basis to ensure that the devices are in place and/or to modify or add new safeguards to accommodate and protect the child as he or she grows taller and stronger.

## Tips for Avoiding Poisoning

### Procedures:

1. Be Aware: Keep cleaning supplies and medications out of reach of children in a cabinet that locks or has a child-resistant latch.
  - Make sure medications are kept in their original containers.

- If you're going to store cleaning products, make sure it's not in the same place as your food or medicines.
  - Do not take medication in front of the child because children tend to imitate adults.
  - Always refer to medications by their full names. Medicine isn't the same as "candy."
  - Before using a product, make sure you read the label.
  - Don't take or give medicines in the dark to avoid accidentally taking the wrong dose.
2. Do a search on a child's level to ensure that no potential hazards go unnoticed.
  3. Check the appropriate box on the checklist as you inspect each room.
    - If you answered "no" to any of the questions on the checklist, take the steps listed to the right to improve the child's safety.
  4. Use this checklist on a regular basis to spot any potential product hazards that the child may have.
  5. If you suspect that a poisoning has occurred, call for an ambulance right away.

## Safety in the Water

### Procedures:

1. Never leave a child unattended in or near water.
2. Be aware of the child's potential water hazards:
  - Keep tubs, coolers, and buckets out of reach of children, and remove water as soon as possible after use.
  - Use toilet seat locks and keep toilet lids closed.
  - Adding layers of protection around pools and other water features is a good idea.
  - Install a 4-foot-tall fence with a self-closing, self-latching gate to completely surround the pool or water feature.
3. Follow these safety rules if the child is near or in water:

Adults in charge of the pool and water area should be CPR certified and have a phone on hand at all times.

- Make sure that safety rules are followed, such as no running.
- Even in a shallow toddler's pool, any child swimming should be within arm's reach of an adult providing "touch supervision." Touch supervision entails always keeping swimming children within arm's reach and visible.
- If a life jacket is used, make sure it fits properly (i.e., it can't be lifted over the child's head after he or she is fastened into it). Life jackets for children aged 5 and under should have a flotation collar to keep the head upright and the face out of the water while swimming.

- Inspect the pool drains to ensure that they are secure and free of cracks, and that protective measures such as anti-entrapment drain covers and a safety vacuum-release system are in place.
- Any beach or swimming pool activity requiring a certified lifeguard - Wading pools with a depth of 24 inches or more at the deepest part requiring a certified lifeguard

## Safety in Car Seats

It is critical to keep children safe in vehicles. When it comes to sudden stops, braking, or collisions, young children are especially vulnerable. When they are not properly restrained in an approved car safety seat, they become projectiles whether they are hit hard or softly. You can provide the best protection for children by choosing a car safety seat that fits both the child and the vehicle and using it consistently on every trip.

As children grow, so will their car seats and their facing positions. Keeping up with these changes ensures that children in your care receive the best possible protection while riding in your vehicle. Also, when children are expected to use safety restraints on a regular basis, they learn to be safe in a moving vehicle and become accustomed to using them. Even when not moving, vehicles can be dangerous to children. When children are left alone in cars, they are at risk of heat stroke and death.

During the day, the temperature inside a vehicle can quickly rise to dangerous levels. Because their bodies produce more heat relative to their size and their abilities to cool themselves through perspiration are not as developed as adults', children are more susceptible to and at a higher risk of heat-related illness and injury.

When transporting children in your care, following proper vehicle transportation procedures can help keep them safe. Checking your car before walking away from it to ensure you haven't forgotten a child inside is an important part of keeping children safe. Furthermore, never leave a child alone in a car for any length of time, and never leave your car unlocked and accessible to children. When children are in a vehicle, they rely on adults to take the necessary and appropriate precautions.

### Procedures:

1. Choose a car seat or booster seat that is appropriate for a child's weight, size, and age, as well as the vehicle in which the child will ride.
2. Learn how to properly install a car safety seat.
  - Child restraints should be installed in the back seat, preferably in the middle. Until they reach the maximum weight and height limits recommended by the seat's manufacturer, an infant or small toddler must be facing toward the back of the vehicle.

- To use your car's seatbelts or LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children) system with a child safety seat, read and follow the instructions in the owner's manual.
- 3. Go over the entire child safety seat manual with your child. When the seat is forward facing or rear facing, make sure to check the recommended recline angle.
- 4. Never put a rear-facing car seat in the front passenger seat of an airbag-equipped vehicle.
- 5. Before each use, double-check the position of the safety seat.
- 6. Harness the child properly for each and every ride.
  - The top of the safety seat should be at least 2 inches (6 centimeters) above the baby's head.
  - Make sure the harnesses are always in the slots and at or below the shoulders of the baby.
  - Check that all harness straps, especially those that cross the shoulder and thigh, are snugly fastened. Straps should never be twisted and should always lie flat. It's too loose if you can pinch any harness webbing between your fingers.
  - Dress baby in clothing that allows the latch crotch strap to be properly buckled between the legs by leaving his or her legs free. If it's cold outside, put the baby in a harness first and then cover him or her with a blanket (but never cover the baby's head).
  - A blanket should never be buckled under or behind the baby. Place rolled-up cloth diapers or rolled hand towels on each side of baby's shoulders if he or she slouches to one side in the seat (as is common with newborns).
  - Place no padding or blanket under the baby; this will compromise the harness's ability to restrain the child.
  - Check the angle of the seat if the baby's head flops forward (which is common with newborns). Tilt the seat back slightly with a towel or blanket (a 30 to 45-degree angle is best).
  - As the child grows, re-adjust the harness straps.
- 7. When an infant is not in a vehicle, limit the amount of time he or she spends in the car seat. Too much time in a car seat can restrict a baby's movement and stimulation, both of which are critical for the development of sensory and motor skills.

## Procedures for Transporting Vehicles

### Procedures:

Before transporting children, make sure to:

1. Have a written policy that addresses the safe transportation of the child in a vehicle while the child is in child care that is shared and signed by the parent. The following should be included in the policy:
  - During transportation, the child-to-staff ratio must be maintained;
  - In the event of an emergency, backup transportation arrangements must be made.
  - Use of a seat belt and a car safety seat, as well as booster seats if necessary.

- Easy access to a first-aid kit, emergency contact information, and health information for children, as well as a cell phone
  - Vehicle and driver licensing, registration, and insurance
  - Procedures to ensure that no child is left unsupervised outside or inside the vehicle during loading and unloading or is left in the vehicle at the end of the trip.
2. 2. Make sure the vehicle you'll be driving is safe, well-maintained, registered, and insured.

#### On the Day of Departure:

3. 1. Check for burns on metal parts of car seats, seat belts, and plastic coverings. When the vehicle is not in use, cover those areas with blankets or towels in hot weather.
4. 2. Place the child in the back seat of the vehicle, away from traffic.
5. 3. Use properly fastened and installed age-appropriate child restraint devices.
6. 4. In vehicles, provide appropriate adult supervision.
7. 5. When the child enters the vehicle, check his or her attendance by name and face.
8. 6. Maintain a comfortable temperature for the child.
9. 7. When you arrive at your destination, unload the child from the vehicle on the same side of the road as the destination, away from traffic.
10. 8. When the child exits the vehicle, check his or her attendance by name and face.
11. 9. Make a final physical check of the vehicle to ensure that everyone has exited.
12. 10. Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle, even if the air conditioner is turned on or the window is left open.

## Heat Stroke Prevention

#### Procedures:

1. Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle, even if the air conditioner is turned on or the window is left open.
2. Take precautions to avoid leaving a child in the car by accident:
  - Before leaving the vehicle, write yourself a note and leave it somewhere you'll see it.
  - Place your purse, briefcase, or other valuables in the back seat so you'll have to check it before exiting.
3. After exiting your vehicle, always lock the doors and trunk, and keep the keys out of reach of children.
4. Never let a child play with keys in the ignition or in a car.
5. If a child goes missing, check all vehicles right away.

**Note:** As an extra precaution, make a plan with the parents of children in your care to call them if their child does not arrive for child care by a certain time and you have not been informed in advance about the change in the child's arrival time.

### Further Reading:

- ✓ *adapting a systems approach to child protection: key concepts and considerations [working paper]. new York: unICEF; January 2010.*
- ✓ *Child Welfare Information Gateway. What is child abuse and neglect [factsheet]. Washington, DC: u.S. Department of Health and Human Services, administration for Children and Families; 2008.*