

# The Director's Link

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## SOS for Your RMP (Risk Management Plan)

*Paula Steffen*

**C**ompare your center's risk management plan to a white water rafting guide. Would your plan be able to navigate you through the uncharted territory of a crisis the same way an experienced guide navigates the water, rocks, and rapids of a river? Looking back as a director of my own center years ago, my center's risk management plan would have been a novice guide at best. Sure, it handled the Class I waves of pipes breaking (that flooded the center), but faced with the Class IV rapids of an armed intruder or a nuclear emergency (we had three power plants nearby), I'm afraid my RMP would not have been much help.

It wasn't that the children's safety wasn't important to me—I planned for fires, tornados, and disgruntled parents—but an armed intruder in small town USA never crossed my mind. Fast forward sixteen years. Daily news reports of natural disasters, babies dying of SIDS, bomb

threats, and (name your own crisis) remind us of the many potential emergencies we must prepare for to protect the children in our care. A comprehensive risk management plan that all staff are familiar with and have practiced in mock drills will serve you well should a crisis arise. Here are the steps to developing your center's risk management plan.

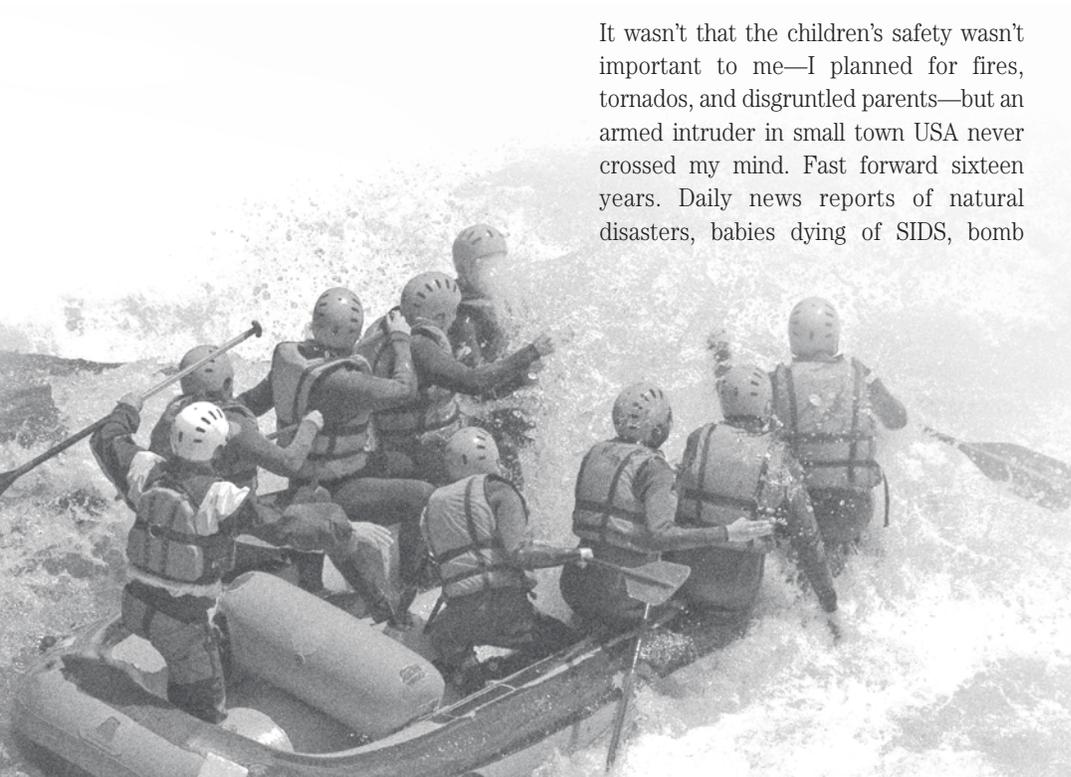
### **Step 1. Assess Your Risks**

Before you begin to write or update your risk management plan, it is important to assess the risks your center might face. If possible, do this with a committee that includes representation from your staff, parents, governing board, community health agencies, other center directors, and local emergency services. Begin your first safety committee meeting by sharing stories of previous emergencies. Then brainstorm to include all potential crises your center might face.

### **Step 2. Update Important Contact Information**

The first page of your risk management plan should be a list of important contacts—the names, addresses, email addresses, and telephone numbers you might need in case of an emergency. Include yourself as director and/or owner, ambulance, fire, poison control, police, state licensing agency, health department, maintenance/clean-up services, window repair, plumber, electrician, locksmith, water department, landlords, and the neighbors near your facility. Sounds comprehensive? You're right. This list should include virtually

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anyone and everyone that you might need to inform or contact for assistance should a crisis happen. Up-to-date emergency contacts, including an out-of-state contact, for each child should be kept with this document as well as in the classroom files.

### **Step 3. Write Procedures for Handling Different Scenarios**

Once a list of potential risks has been developed, your actual writing can begin. Your risk management plan should include clear procedures to follow in the event of an emergency, guidelines to reduce the risk of child abuse or neglect allegations, and steps that can be taken to maintain the safety of people, facilities, equipment, and materials. Use these areas to outline the content of your center-specific plan.

*Procedures to follow in the event of an emergency.* In this section, include all the potential risks your committee came up with that would constitute a legitimate emergency. Situations might include a fire, severe storm (tornado or hurricane), earthquake, power outage, sewer back-up, intruder, vehicle accident, illness, death of a child or staff member, nuclear disaster, or a bomb threat.

For each risk you have identified, create clear and specific procedures that include roles and responsibilities for specific staff members, evacuation and lock-down procedures, and communication guidelines to notify parents and authorities. Keep the information concise and to the point. In a crisis no one has time to comb through a lot of wordy text to get to the critical information needed.

*Guidelines to reduce the risk of child abuse or neglect allegations.* For this section, identify the ways your center can be proactive in reducing the likelihood that a staff member could ever be accused of child abuse or neglect. Examples might include an open-door policy stating that parents are welcome to visit at any time, a policy preventing a staff member from being alone in the center with one or more children, a policy that prohibits classroom windows from being covered with paper or artwork, and the use of sign-in and sign-out daily logs.

Also be sure to include policies regarding daily health checks of children upon arrival, documentation and reporting all minor and major injuries of children, discipline guidelines, and required staff trainings that ensure the health and welfare of children. Required training is important so that staff realize these policies are to protect them from allegations of child abuse or neglect. When they understand this, they will be more likely to implement the policies.

*“Every little  
thing counts  
in a crisis.”*

Jawaharlal Nehru

*Procedures to maintain the safety of people, facilities, equipment, and materials.* Ensuring the safety of people includes implementing universal precautions and procedures for toy sanitation, hand washing, and diapering. It also includes guidelines for working with children with allergies and chronic medical conditions, policies regarding persons authorized to pick up children from the center, procedures for checking identification when an unfamiliar person picks up a child, and guidelines for dispensing medication and dealing with ill children. Confidentiality policies should also be included in this section.

Maintaining a safe facility includes information about activating and deactivating the center's alarm service, steps for securing the center's entrances, and a schedule for ensuring pest control. It also includes procedures for checking the condition of the play yard fence, parking lot, locked gates, fire extinguishers, and smoke alarms as well as periodic checks of equipment for broken pieces, splinters, and peeling paint.

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### **Our Mission**

*The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership is dedicated to enhancing the management skills, professional orientation, and leadership capacity of early childhood administrators. The activities of the Center encompass four areas: training and technical assistance, program evaluation, research, and public awareness.*

<http://cecl.nl.edu>



# The Director's Toolbox

## Are You Prepared?

Evaluating your ability to minimize risk and/or respond to disasters can help improve your success in those situations. Take a few moments to complete the following checklist.

	Yes	Needs Fixing	Who Fixes?
Do you have clear written procedures to follow in the event of an emergency?			
Is an evacuation route posted in each classroom and have you identified nearby locations to evacuate to if necessary?			
Do you have a system for informing parents if you need to evacuate the building?			
Do you have written guidelines to reduce the risk of child abuse or neglect allegations (e.g., open door policy, accident report log, requiring more than one staff member in the building whenever children are present)?			
Is information on children's medical allergies and chronic medical conditions kept in the classrooms as well as in the office files?			
Are substitute teachers informed of the allergies and chronic medical conditions of the children in their care?			
Are fire drills conducted monthly?			
Are drills for situations where children must stay in the building but move to a safe location practiced at least twice a year?			
Does the center maintain records detailing the date of each drill, length of the drill, and improvements needed?			
Is at least one staff member in each classroom trained in CPR and First Aid?			
Does each classroom have a First Aid kit?			
Is there a list of emergency numbers posted by all telephones?			
Does each classroom have a flashlight and battery-operated radio?			
Do you have more than one emergency phone number for each child, including an out-of-state number?			
Are parent and emergency phone numbers kept in a log that is portable?			
Do you have procedures for keeping track of children during fieldtrips?			
Do you have a policy restricting the release of children to unauthorized adults?			
Have you established an emergency code system with staff for incidents where using code words is necessary?			
Do you have a system in place for ensuring that all playground structures and equipment are safe and hazard free?			
Do you have restrictions on accessibility in and out of the center?			

You'll certainly want to make sure that all cleaning supplies labeled "Keep out of reach of children" are locked away. Include in your risk management plan the schedule for facility and equipment maintenance, as well as the vehicle maintenance schedule if your center transports children. Another important, but often overlooked area, is guidelines to minimize the likelihood of fraud or theft. Ensuring that the center's evacuation plan is posted is also crucial.

#### **Step 4. Implement Your Plan**

Policies and procedures only work if they are implemented. Once your plan is written, utilize your safety committee and everyone involved in the daily operation of the center—board members, staff, volunteers—in reviewing the plan and giving feedback *before* it becomes official. Make sure everyone understands and agrees to their role in disaster situations. Supervision throughout the year will be vital to make sure staff follow policies and perform procedures correctly and in a timely manner.

People who have experienced emergency situations often report that they lost valuable time and did things incorrectly because they either panicked or never practiced implementing their risk management procedures. Practicing drills and reviewing procedures seems tedious at times, but can save lives.

Update policies and procedures as needed, and annually conduct a formal review of your risk management plan with your safety committee. Be sure to date and document changes and updates as they occur.

#### **Step 5. Distribute Your Plan**

Copies of your risk management plan should be kept on-site in the administrative office and in each classroom. The RMP needs to be easily accessible to staff in emergency situations when time is of the essence and when they may be in a situation where they cannot leave their classroom to go get the plan. Staff should have copies as well as members of your safety committee. Keep at least one copy off-site—either with a safety committee member, your lawyer, or other professional.

### **In Sum**

Developing a risk management plan for your center is important for both preventing accidents and for minimizing the damage when an unexpected crisis does occur. Much like a white water rafting guide studies the river's topography before donning a life vest and heading down the rapids, the very act of thinking through different scenarios and becoming familiar with alternative courses of action will help you and your staff be more prepared for the unanticipated. A well-crafted risk management plan is also a smart business strategy that can help you prevent financial loss, reduce your liability for lawsuits, and help preserve your center's good reputation.

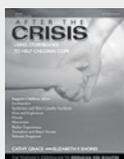
*Paula Steffen is a training and technical assistance specialist for the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University. Previously she was professional development coordinator for the Illinois career development system and a center director.*

## **Need Help?**

If your center doesn't have a risk management plan, you're not alone. A recent national study of early childhood programs found that only 44% had a comprehensive written risk management plan that included emergency procedures, guidelines to reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect, and measures for ensuring the safety of people, facilities, equipment, and materials. Here are two resources by Cathy Grace and Elizabeth Shores that will help you create a disaster readiness plan to ensure the safety of the children in your care.



**Preparing for Disaster: What Every Early Childhood Director Needs to Know.** This guide is filled with the practical information every early childhood administrator needs to know to create and implement a disaster readiness master plan, train teachers and administrators on how to react in a catastrophic event, and educate parents to reduce panic.



**After the Crisis: Using Storybooks to Help Children Cope.** This companion book to *Preparing for Disaster* shows educators how to help young children who have been through a trauma such as homelessness, a natural disaster, or death of a loved one. With activities and exercises that can be used in conjunction with 50 children's books, discussion starters, writing activities, and art centers, *After the Crisis* promotes children's ability to cope and heal.

Available from Gryphon House (800) 638-0928, [www.gryphonhouse.com](http://www.gryphonhouse.com).

# Planning Ahead

## Professional Development Opportunities

### Taking Charge of Change

August 2 - 7, 2010

Follow-up Retreats: November 18 - 20, 2010 and May 11 - 14, 2011

*Taking Charge of Change* is an extraordinary professional development experience guaranteed to transform how you think about your role as an early childhood leader. Topics focus on individual and organizational change and the director's role as change agent. Through interactive learning, group discussions, guided reflection, reading, and visits to exemplary programs, participants explore the components of quality programming and how to implement change to achieve program goals. Mentors are available for consultation during the year to assist participants in implementing their program improvements.

**Format:** Intensive six-day residential summer institute, follow-up retreat in November, Leadership Connections conference in May

**Location:** McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership  
National-Louis University, Wheeling Campus Annex

**Fee:** \$425, includes text and materials, lodging, meals, and Leadership Connections registration

Space is limited to 28 participants. Priority is given to directors whose programs serve IDHS-funded children. Participants may receive undergraduate or graduate credit by paying an additional fee. Application deadline is June 4, 2010.

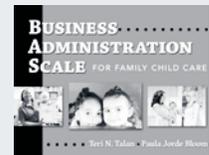
### Business Administration Scale - Assessor Reliability Training

August 23-25, 2010

*The Business Administration Scale for Family Child Care* (BAS) is the first valid and reliable tool for measuring and improving the overall quality of business and professional practices in family child care settings. This three-day training is designed for organizational consultants, resource and referral specialists, family child care network supervisors, and college instructors who are interested in improving the quality of business and professional practices in family child care settings. Participants will learn how the BAS can be used to set goals to incrementally improve business practices that result in better communication with parents, financial stability, reduced risk in operating a home business, and compliance with legal requirements.

**Location:** McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership  
National-Louis University, Wheeling Campus Annex

**Fee:** \$750, includes texts, materials, and meals



### Program Administration Scale - Assessor Reliability Training

July 12-15, 2010

*The Program Administration Scale* (PAS) measures leadership and management practices of center-based early care and education programs. Assessor Reliability Training includes an overview of the instrument, how to rate indicators and score items, the protocol for interviewing and collecting data, and procedures for verifying documentation. Individuals who successfully complete the training are eligible to become certified PAS assessors. This four-day training is designed for technical assistance specialists, quality monitors, management, consultants, researchers, and other professionals interested in using the PAS to reliably assess early childhood leadership and management practices.

**Location:** McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership  
National-Louis University, Wheeling Campus Annex

**Fee:** \$1,025 includes all texts, materials, and meals



Participants may receive two semester hours of graduate credit (ECE582C, Early Childhood Program Evaluation) by paying an additional fee and satisfactorily completing an assignment.

**Hotel accommodations are available at the Candlewood Suites adjacent to the Center.  
Call (847) 520-1684.**

**For more information about these professional development opportunities,  
please contact Debra Trude-Suter at (800) 443-5522, ext. 5056 or [debra.trudesuter@nl.edu](mailto:debra.trudesuter@nl.edu).  
You can also register online at <http://cecl.nl.edu>.**

# LEADERSHIP Connections

**Join Us to Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Center  
and the 10th Anniversary of Leadership Connections**

Time is running out! Don't miss out on this extraordinary conference designed especially for early childhood leaders. Be inspired by national experts and learn creative solutions to the challenges of delivering high-quality early childhood services. Open to early childhood professionals across the country who are making a difference in their communities. This conference experience will validate what you know and are already doing while challenging you to think about your work in new ways. Rejuvenate yourself!

**Date:** May 13 - 15, 2010

**Location:** Westin Chicago North Shore  
601 North Milwaukee Avenue, Wheeling, IL

**Fee:** \$400 before May 1, 2010

*Discounts are available for groups of 10 or more.*

Conference fee includes: opening luncheon and keynote, public policy forum, seminars, skill-building clinics, marketplace, networking reception and celebration, pamper yourself activity night, continental breakfast on Friday and Saturday, Friday lunch, and closing luncheon and keynote. A series of preconference activities will be offered on Wednesday, May 12. Participants may earn undergraduate or graduate credit by paying an additional fee and participating in follow-up activities.

**For more information about registration or sponsorship opportunities, contact Donna Jonas at (800) 443-5522, ext. 5058, [donna.jonas@nl.edu](mailto:donna.jonas@nl.edu), or <http://cecl.nl.edu>**



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or call (800) 443-5522 ext. 5155

### TAKE TIME OUT TO CHAT WITH THE EXPERTS ONLINE!

The Center hosts a series of online discussions moderated by nationally recognized early childhood experts. These online discussions are free and open to the public. Join the conversation to chat with the people who have helped shape early childhood policy and practice.

#### **Shifting from Administrative to Program-Focused Leadership**

**Monday, May 17 -  
Saturday, May 22, 2010**

**Guest expert:  
Anne Marie Coughlin**



Ann Marie Coughlin is the Director of Program Leadership at London Bridge Child Care Services in London, Ontario, Canada. Over her 25-year career, Anne Marie has worked as a classroom educator, a center director, professional development coordinator, and college faculty. She speaks on topics that range from curriculum and leadership development to personal wellness.

*Register free from our website (<http://cecl.nl.edu>)*