

Health and safety in toddler groups: Tips for keeping your group safe

If you are running a toddler group, you will want to do so in a safe way – in fact, ensuring good health and safety practices for your group is essential. It can seem a little bit daunting at first, but it is not difficult, though it does require a bit of thought and planning. To help you do that, we've highlighted the following areas for you to look at.

Getting set up

If you are connected to a church, your church should have a safeguarding policy which will cover your toddler group, so make sure that you have a copy of that. It is very important that everyone has a current Disclosure Barring scheme (DBS) clearance as this is a legal requirement for everyone who works in a regulated setting whether paid or voluntarily. Make sure, too, that you are kept updated on any future changes in safeguarding guidelines.

As parents or carers stay with their children in toddler group, you do not need to have a certain number of adults on your team, just a number that makes the workload acceptable for everyone. But you do need to make sure that your venue is not overcrowded. Current guidelines suggest that you allow 3.5 m² per child aged under two years (The Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage, March 2021, p35). This allows for sufficient space for movement and for everyone to exit safely in case of an emergency.

When you arrive to set up for your group, check that the floor is clean and completely free of anything left by other groups. Old food, rubbish, drawing pins etc are all potential hazards and it may be necessary to sweep or vacuum before getting toys out. Make sure that any electric sockets have child covers on them. Sitting on the floor and taking a look at your surroundings from a toddler's point of view is a good way to help you see what hazards need to be covered up or removed.

Toys

It is important to make sure that all your toys (bought or donated) are in good condition with no dangerous cracks or sharp edges and that they are cleaned regularly. They should be appropriate for young children coming with no small parts that can be swallowed. Watch out for small bits in your craft activities! If you use only toys that have these quality assurance marks, you can be confident that they are not dangerous:

The Lion Mark identifies toys that are safe for children to use.



The CE Mark indicates that the product meets all the relevant consumer safety, environmental or health requirements of the European Directive.



The British Standards Institute Kitemark is a sign of reliability and safety.



When setting out your toys, ensure that there is enough space for the toddlers to run around and use ride-on toys away from the babies. Once your toys are out, close cupboard doors – be aware that some may need to be locked (e.g. the cleaning cupboard). Child gates also need to be available to stop children entering kitchens, climbing stairs, or leaving the building, especially if you have doors open in hot weather or for ventilation.

Food and drink

Children should be seated when eating and drinking during snack time. Check with each child's parent for any food allergies and be sensitive to these, making sure that you provide suitable alternatives. Wheat and dairy allergies are fairly common in children, so ask their parents what snacks their children can have. Do not bring anything with nuts into the group as nut allergy can be very serious. If you are a venue open to the public and are providing food and refreshments, ensure that you meet the local authority food hygiene and safety requirements accordingly.

Use toddler cups that are easy to clean and ensure that they are thoroughly washed after each use. The kitchen should be a child-free zone, especially if you are making hot drinks. As a team you should consider how to balance the children's safety with the wish for parents to have a hot drink. Perhaps you could serve the adults their drinks during the children's snack time, or ask the parents to put drinks down whilst walking around the room.

Changing

Provide changing facilities with wet wipes and antibacterial cleaner and cloths. There must be a hand basin and hand-wash for the adult. Providing nappy bags is a help, but nappies must be disposed of in outside bins or in specialist disposal bins.

COVID-19

It's important to be aware and keep up to date regarding current risk levels and regulations related to COVID-19 in your area. If you're linked to a church, there may also be guidelines or requirements laid down by your denomination to follow. Consider aspects such as ventilation, room capacity, hand sanitiser etc, and be aware of any concerns that older or more vulnerable volunteers or attendees in particular may have.

Worst-case scenario

Be prepared for the worst to happen. It is very important that your fire exits are well signed and that access is clear at all times (no buggies in front of these doors!). A sign-in sheet means that you know who is in the building in case you need to evacuate. A first aid kit should be easily accessible and contain small and large size items for both children and adults. One of your team should be trained in first aid on a course that covers infants. Such courses are available from St John Ambulance or Red Cross.

Health and safety issues are important and we hope the list above will be a help. For further information contact Thirtyone:eight, an independent Christian safeguarding charity. Tel: 0303 003 1111. Web: www.thirtyoneeight.org Search their website for 'keeping children safe guidance' in their spring 2021 magazine.

Find out more: www.cff.org.uk/playtime

Care for the Family

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