

# Guide to Crisis Management



**EMERGENCY**

LIGHT ON INDICATES CALL RECEIVED





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# Guide to crisis management of camp, recreation, and child care programs

## Introduction

The headlines seem to come with increasing frequency. Child injured in hike at summer camp ... tornado destroys child care center ... child reported missing after YMCA outing ... children strike out at schoolmates.

As a youth-serving professional, would you and your staff know what to do if something terrible were to happen? How would you and your staff react to an unexpected life-threatening, chaotic and emotionally charged situation?

While it is impossible to anticipate every event, you can develop a framework for responding to crises that may increase the likelihood of a good outcome.

The purpose of this document is to provide you with the tools and critical thinking skills which you can use to help you make the best decisions when you are challenged by circumstances beyond your immediate control.

If you already have a crisis plan in place, use this guide to refine or reaffirm what you have developed. If you don't have a plan, we hope that you will use this outline as a starting point. In either instance, share your plan and crisis management information with your staff. Educate them. Practice.

Just don't wait for a crisis to happen before you begin figuring out what to do.





## What would you do if...?

It's Monday afternoon and all outdoor activities have been changed to indoor crafts due to hard rain. The wind has been a distraction all day; now one of your aides whispers to you that a tornado warning is in effect. "Probably routine," you think.

Suddenly, the calm indoors is pierced by an ear-shattering noise that sounds like a freight train racing toward your front door. Before you can act, the roof of your facility is gone, exposing part of the general supplies area and the office. Rain is pouring in, and furniture and papers are blowing around. Children are screaming, crying and running for cover. You've lost track of your aides.

Then, as quickly as the pandemonium began, a frightening quiet takes over. Slowly, things begin to stir. What do you do?

### You respond.

If you wait until a crisis occurs to figure out how to respond, you will lose precious time.

## What is a crisis?

When asked to define "crisis," most people would respond by describing a cataclysmic event, like a tornado, hurricane, medical emergency or an emotionally trying situation. Because the experience of a crisis is highly individualized, what represents a crisis for one person may not be experienced as a crisis by someone else.

When a crisis has occurred, we are faced with incomprehensible uncertainty. We don't know what lies ahead. The aftermath might include serious injury, loss of life, damage to property and reputation, litigation, or even the loss of your business.

No two people will define "crisis" in the same way.

It may help, however, to keep the following in mind:

- A crisis is an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs, an emotionally significant event, a radical change in the status of a person's life, or a serious endangerment to property in which a decisive change for better or worse is impending.
- In crisis situations, it is obvious or highly likely that a third party (such as the police, medical personnel, or an insurance company) will be involved in some way.

## Before the crisis

Preparation is the key to effective crisis management. The best time to think about how to handle a potential situation is well before it happens. Setting aside "Think Time" now to outline a crisis management plan may increase the likelihood of a positive outcome and maximize "Response Time" after a crisis has occurred.

We urge you to put together a kit that contains these guidelines and other materials you may need in a crisis.

Call your local emergency management agency (EMA) to identify potential natural and man-made disasters that may affect your area. Once you have identified potential exposures, arrange a meeting with your EMA for additional suggestions that will help make your crisis management responses more specific to the disasters that may occur in your area.

Remember, in addition to preserving the lives and health of the children in your care, your crisis management plan should also protect your organizational structure and operations, personnel, and services you provide. Consider storing duplicate business records in a secured, offsite location. Review your plan at least once a year with your staff, so it is practiced and current.

## Responding to a crisis

As you develop your crisis management plan, design your communications strategy. You may need to communicate the crisis while it is happening. For example, you may need to notify your staff that a hostile intruder is in your facility or on your grounds. Developing a code word or door card ahead of time and using it when a crisis occurs will let your staff know it's time to implement the crisis management plan.

Immediately following the event, the steps you take should be responsive in nature. Planned, practiced actions can help you avoid chaos and lower the risk of additional negative consequences.

During the first few minutes, concentrate on gathering accurate, concise information. This information will help you respond immediately and eliminate confusion later.

Realize that things are likely to happen rapidly and often simultaneously. Stay focused, but flexible when carrying out the first steps of your plan. You may need to change the order of the following actions.

## Action steps

### 1. Find Out

Find out and record exactly what happened; which individuals were involved; and their current location, present condition, and immediate needs. Note any actions that have been taken so far. Ascertain who was in charge or supervising when the incident occurred, and determine who is in charge now. Assess which resources you now have available, which outside resources may be called in, and how such assistance will be delivered.

Document the facts as you learn them. Keep a notebook and pen or pencil in your crisis response kit.

### Essential facts checklist

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- Where are they now?
- What is their present condition?
- What action has been taken so far?
- Who was supervising?
- Who is in charge?
- What internal resources are available?
- What outside resources are needed?
- How will assistance be delivered?
- When did the incident occur?

As you get the facts about what happened or is still happening, it's important to determine if the crisis is life threatening or not. If you are faced with a bomb threat, shooter, or the encroachment of a life-threatening situation, you may need to take immediate action before you contact emergency services.

### 2. Call emergency services

Equipped with facts, call 911 or the appropriate emergency services. Telephone numbers to emergency services should be prominently posted, and kept in multiple locations so that they can be accessed quickly and easily. Include directions to your facility with emergency phone numbers. In a crisis, it may be difficult for staff to provide precise directions to emergency personnel. Consider adding a fully-charged cellular telephone, with telephone number clearly posted on it, to your crisis response kit (see page 8). This way, if your telephone services are not working, you may still be able to communicate.

Calls made at this time should be kept to an absolute minimum. Limit your calls to the following:

#### Emergency medical services:

Describe the situation accurately and quickly. The facts you have gathered will help you to respond to the dispatcher's questions and increase the likelihood of a prompt and proper response. Remember to ask relevant questions. For example, if children or adults have been injured, find out what actions should be taken before the emergency medical personnel arrive.

We recommend having one or more staff members certified in CPR and First Aid on the premises at all times.

#### Fire department:

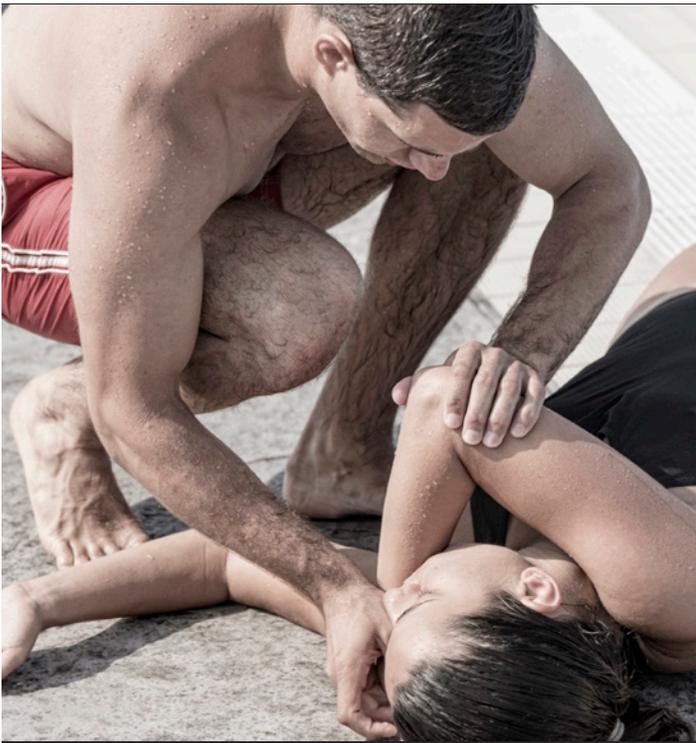
You may need to alert the fire department, even if there is no evidence of fire. There may be unknown hazards present—gas leaks, hazardous chemical spills, for example—that the fire department can identify and remedy.

#### Police department:

If a crime has occurred, notify the police immediately. The police can also be helpful in securing and controlling access to the area.

Special circumstances may require calls to other authorities or agencies. For instance, call the Poison Control Center if you suspect that a child or adult has ingested a harmful substance. If you suspect that a child is missing, immediately call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The Center can mobilize resources and coordinate a search with the FBI and local authorities. Keep in mind that the first minutes and hours after a child is suspected missing are often the most important in obtaining a successful recovery.





### 3. Stabilize the situation

With help on the way, your attention can be directed to stabilizing the situation. You can accomplish this by accounting for those involved, assessing their condition, removing everyone from further harm, and controlling the activity at the scene.

When you develop your plan, identify individuals on your staff who can act as “greeters.” Greeters help monitor the flow of traffic, keep unauthorized individuals out of the crisis area, and direct press inquiries to a designated spokesperson. The individuals you select for this role should be diplomatic but authoritative, articulate, and level-headed.

Greeters also need to be well versed on your crisis management plan. Provide them with brief, bullet points of information about how the media can contact the designated spokesperson, as well as how, when, and where parents can retrieve their children.

As soon as possible, disperse these greeters to strategic areas (entrances, exits) with appropriate instructions. When something terrible happens, people who want to help, onlookers, media and less well-intentioned people often flock to the site.

Account for all individuals involved. In the confusion of the moment, it may be difficult to remember everyone’s name. A current roster and list of staff and volunteers should be placed in your crisis response kit. Camps which are both day and resident may have different rosters at different times of the day. Child care centers care for different children from day to day, and sometimes from hour to hour. Consider making a duplicate of your sign in sheet, and periodically placing the duplicate in your crisis response kit.

Immediately attend to the needs of those people who are obviously injured, and search for others who may have been injured. Administer care following the instructions you receive from Emergency Services. After injured individuals have been cared for or placed in the care of a qualified person such as an EMT, turn your attention to the non-injured individuals who may have witnessed the event.

If possible, gather the non-injured individuals in a centralized location. This may be an undamaged area within your premises. This area should be free from hazards and access should be restricted. Use barriers if they are available, and station a greeter at the entrance and exit to the area.

Assign an adequate number of staff members to care for the uninjured children. It is important to maintain a balance between the demands of the crisis and the need for continuity of everyday activities. Children should be closely observed. Some children may seem to be okay, even though they may be hurt or deeply affected by the incident. Sometimes the crisis will elicit memories of earlier trauma. Watch for these “silent sufferers,” and make sure that they receive appropriate care and attention.

In your crisis planning, consider using a neighboring camp, child care center, school, church or synagogue as a possible evacuation site. Make arrangements to use these facilities in advance, and store emergency supplies at these locations. If necessary, plan ahead for the safe transportation of the children in your care to these alternative emergency facilities.

Finally, preserve the integrity of the scene to the best of your ability. Some items can provide important forensic evidence for police, medical personnel, insurance companies and others. Restrict as much of the affected area and objects as circumstances allow.

### Checklist for stabilization

- ✓ Deal with hazards in the area.
- ✓ Disperse greeters.
- ✓ Account for individuals; gather in a central location.
- ✓ Attend to the needs of the injured.
- ✓ Look for additional injuries.
- ✓ Attend to the needs of the non-injured.
- ✓ Assign a staff person to care for the uninjured children.
- ✓ Preserve everything involved in the incident.

#### 4. Establish crisis headquarters

Once the immediate pressure of the crisis has abated and the situation has been stabilized, organize crisis headquarters. Look for an area that is reasonably quiet and secluded. A calm atmosphere will allow for clear thinking and an opportunity to make phone calls without distraction. Many directors believe that locating crisis headquarters in their facility's office has a positive effect on parents, children, and others. However, we recommend avoiding areas that are likely to become a hubbub of activity, which may include the facility's office. In any case, scout possible locations in advance, and find at least one alternative that fits the bill.

Store emergency equipment and supplies in a pre-designated area so that they can be easily and rapidly moved into crisis headquarters. When headquarters is functional, take some time to think about a protocol for the phone calls you will make. A telephone protocol is a statement or script that you and designated staff can use to impart information about the crisis accurately and consistently. This procedure can help reduce speculation and contain the "emotional temperature."

We strongly recommend consulting your attorney for advice in drafting or reviewing a script or statement.

Consider adding a separate unlisted telephone line that can be used specifically in emergency situations. Set up a log for incoming and outgoing telephone calls, and assign one person to monitor the telephone. It's extremely important that you maintain a record of what has been communicated, with whom you spoke and when the conversation occurred. This log should be maintained until the crisis is completely resolved. Be conservative — staff the phones and record all activity until you are comfortable that the crisis has passed.

Designate one individual as the facility's spokesperson. Typically, this will be the director, unless he or she is unable to fulfill this role.

#### 5. Contact parents/guardians of children involved

Your first communication with the parents and guardians of children involved in the incident can be a very difficult task. At this point, take some time to think about what you want to communicate. Put yourself in a parent's place. How would you want someone to deliver this kind of news? What would you want to know? How might you react?

For now, focus on informing the parents and guardians of the children who have been directly involved — injured, harmed or adversely affected — in the crisis. With your attorney, compose a script for these conversations that provides the facts of the situation, and reflects your concern for the well-being of parents, guardians, and children.

Offer to make arrangements for parents or guardians to travel to the hospital, your facility or emergency location. Consider sending a staff member to accompany them. Coordinate their arrival and arrange for suitable accommodations once they have arrived.

#### 6. Mobilize the crisis team

Your professional and business advisors, as well as community leaders and agencies, may be able to offer you assistance in responding to the aftermath of a crisis. Activate these resources now.

In assessing the range of care and supervision needed, consider the crisis' impact on each of the following groups:

1) individuals directly involved in the incident; 2) those closely affected by the incident; and 3) your facility's community — other children, parents, guardians, volunteers, and others with whom you regularly interact.

Once you have an understanding of the kind of care you need, begin to plan the level of intervention that the situation requires. There are three levels of intervention to consider: the facility's crisis response team; local community resources; and outside resources. Identify the areas in which you will need assistance. Seek clergy and mental health providers who have experience in responding to crises.

Each member of your team should have a clearly defined role. During implementation, coordinate the flow of information between team members.

Realize that children, staff and volunteers may show secondary effects of involvement in or having witnessed an incident. Keep track of everyone involved in the event, even if they withdraw from your program or leave your employ. Unexpressed anger, for example, can lead to an accumulation of resentment. Follow up with those involved and find out how they are doing.



## Suggested emergency resources:

### National:

American Red Cross  
Centers for Disease Control  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Federal Emergency  
Management Agency  
Center for Missing and Exploited  
Children  
Occupational Safety and Health  
Administration  
Poison Control Center  
Department of Homeland Security

### Community:

Animal Control Agency  
Hospitals, local and regional  
Child Welfare Agency  
Gas and Electric Company  
Health Departments, local and state  
Telephone Company  
Water Company  
Family or Women's Shelter

### Facility Specific:

Alarm Companies  
Electrician  
Equipment Rental Services  
Fire Equipment Service Company  
Food Service Vendors  
General Contractor  
Medical Supply Company  
Plumber  
Pool Service Company  
Transportation Services  
Tree Care Specialist  
Veterinarian

## 7. Call emergency resources

Contact the appropriate emergency resources to help with cleanup, repair, and continued management of the crisis. Your crisis response kit should contain a list of these resources, contact names and their office and emergency phone numbers. For your convenience, we have prepared a list of emergency resources and have supplied phone numbers for national resources such as the American Red Cross, the Center for Disease Control, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

## 8. Call support resources

Establish relationships with advisors and community resources well in advance of a crisis so that they can be quickly mobilized if a crisis occurs. Identify people who have had specific experience in crisis response. When you solicit the assistance of these individuals, ask whether there will be a fee associated with their participation. Note this in your crisis response files, along with the day and after-hours telephone numbers for your contacts.

Familiarize support resources with your facility. Invite them to visit at their convenience so that you can acquaint them with your site, staff and program.

## 9. Contact other parents/guardians

Contact the parents and guardians of those who were not directly involved in the incident, and tell them what has occurred. You can do this by telephone or letter, depending on the level of urgency required by the situation.

Begin your message by acknowledging that an incident has occurred. Assure parents that their child was not involved in the incident. Provide basic facts about the incident, but do not discuss details or identify individuals who were involved in the incident. Inform parents about the level of support that was or will be provided to their child. Emphasize that your facility will continue to operate normally.

Close by thanking the parents for their patience and understanding, and encourage them to contact you if they have any questions or concerns.

We suggest having your attorney review the notice prior to its release. Whether you communicate by phone or mail, keep a log of all telephone calls and correspondence received in response to your message. Maintain the log until the issue has been fully resolved.



## Suggested support resources:

- Insurance agent/company
- Attorney/law firm
- Business partners/Board of Directors
- Neighboring schools, child care centers, camps
- Clergy
- Mental health professionals
- Physicians
- Professional associations
- Public relations advisors

## 10. Manage the media

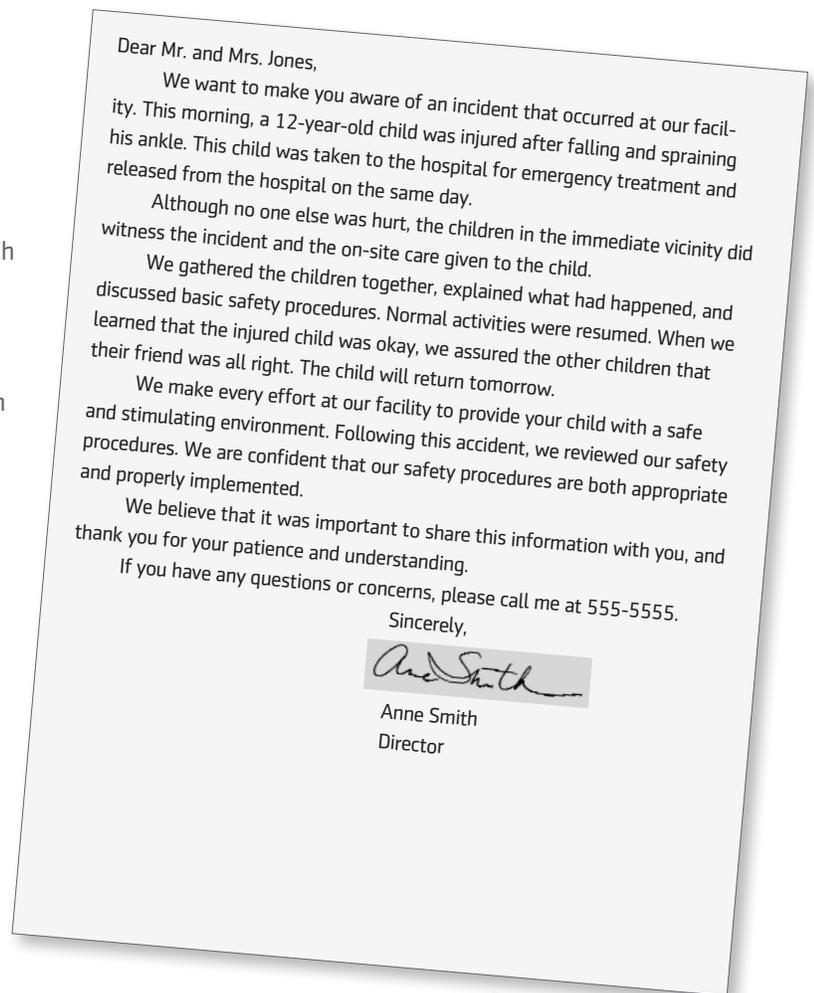
Crises which involve children seem to attract a large amount of media attention. If your program experiences a crisis, you should *expect* that the media will become involved. How you handle the media can have a significant impact on your facility's reputation.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take that may alleviate "bad press." Develop relationships with the media now. An open house is an excellent way of familiarizing the media with your operation. Keep a file with television, radio and print contacts and their telephone numbers, and consider meeting with them if they seek your input on various issues.

Prepare a press kit that contains details about your operation and include its history, a description of your facility(s), program and pertinent information about your safety record. Keep the kit up-to-date and accessible, so that if a crisis does occur, information about the incident can be added to complete the kit with a minimum of effort.

Consider notifying your media contacts after a crisis has occurred — before they contact you. Review all of the information that you plan to provide the media with your attorney before releasing it. Consider asking your attorney to be present when you speak with media representatives.

Make arrangements to meet with the press in one place, at one time. During this meeting, try to place the incident in a historical perspective. Describe your program, your overall safety record and business practices. Ask the media for balanced, not sensational, reporting of the incident. Provide them with the basic facts of the incident, avoid speculation and assigning blame. Do not release the names or any other personal information about the people involved in the event. Also, keep in mind that when meeting with the media, nothing is "off the record." Review all information with your attorney before its release.



Sample Letter to Parents and Guardians.



## Post incident follow-up

### 11. Post incident actions

In the weeks and months following the incident, carry out status checks with those persons involved, their families, others affected by the incident and members of the facility's community. Similarly, contact members of your crisis response team. Ask them to help evaluate your response. Focus on what you could do better, and update your crisis response plan accordingly. Periodically check your crisis response supplies and kit, so that they are complete and up-to-date.

#### Crisis response kit

- Notebooks, pencils, pens
- A cell phone/charged/extra battery/with number posted on phone
- Emergency services telephone numbers
- Current roster with medications & special needs
- Child profile kits
- List of staff and volunteers
- List of emergency contact numbers for children and staff
- List of emergency resources and telephone numbers
- List of support resources and telephone numbers
- List of media contacts
- Copy of crisis response plan
- Flashlight
- National Oceanographic & Atmospheric Administration weather radio (battery-operated)
- Blankets
- First aid kit
- Batteries
- Bottled water—at least a 24-hour supply
- Snacks
- Permission to treat/health forms
- Diapers, bottles
- Disposable camera with flash
- Current phone book
- Change for pay phones
- Whistles



### 12. Organize files and prepare reports

During the course of the crisis, you will have compiled a great deal of information. Shortly afterward, you should organize the data you have collected. Make copies of your incident notes, telephone logs, prepared statements, etc., so that you can use this material in compiling reports you write or file.

Reports should be prepared and preserved in consultation with your attorney and insurance agent. These reports should be factual in content and should contain a description of everything that happened and how you and others responded. Do not release reports to anyone who is not specifically authorized by your attorney or others representing your interests. If you can, arrange face-to-face meetings with investigators or confirm their identity with a third party.

Be sure to file all claims and incident reports with the appropriate authorities in a timely manner. These include medical, property, liability and workers' compensation insurance claims, reports to child welfare authorities, OSHA and other state/local regulatory agencies. Cooperate fully with any ongoing investigations conducted by the authorities.

## File and reports checklist

- ✓ Incident notes
- ✓ Telephone logs
- ✓ Scripts and statements
- ✓ Correspondence
- ✓ Insurance claims — medical/accident insurance
  - ✓ Worker's compensation
  - ✓ Liability
  - ✓ Property
- ✓ Reports —
  - ✓ child welfare agencies
  - ✓ OSHA
  - ✓ Health Department
  - ✓ State and local agencies
- ✓ Press clippings and videos of television coverage

## The importance of “Plan B”

- You awaken in the morning and discover that a power outage during the night has reset your alarm clock, causing you to oversleep.
- You're driving to a meeting and find yourself hopelessly stuck in traffic.
- Your plane arrives in Denver as planned, but your baggage is sent to Atlanta. It's midnight and you have a 10am meeting with an important client.

### *What do you do?*

When confronted with obstacles or “what ifs,” we're often challenged to come up with “Plan Bs.”

In dealing with crisis, “Plan Bs” take on additional importance. People may not be able to perform the tasks they've been assigned; services expected may not be available; the situation may have aspects that were unanticipated.

When you review your crisis response plan, take time to develop and document “Plan Bs.” Help your staff understand the multiple tasks or duties they may be asked to perform.

## Take care of yourself

Throughout this process you have been attending to the needs of **everyone**. Do not neglect your own care. There are sources of support for you “inside” and “outside” your facility. Spend time with your staff and children in your care. **Reconnect with your core beliefs (why and how you opened your child care center, camp, or recreation facility).**

Take time for physical exercise and relaxation. Give yourself permission to participate in and enjoy everyday routines, as well as special events. Treat yourself with kindness. Be aware of, appreciate, and generate humor. Maintain involvement in professional and community activities.

Remember, none of us is alone. Avoid isolation. Spend time with friends. Don't hesitate to develop a relationship with a mental health professional who can help you work through this difficult experience.

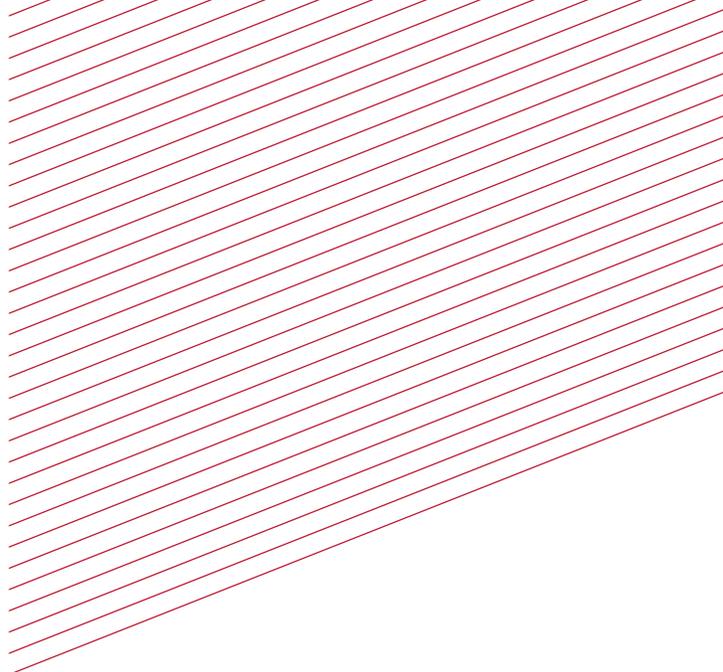
### About the author...

This guide was developed from materials provided by Bruce Muchnick, Ed.D. Dr. Muchnick is a licensed psychologist whose work includes psychotherapy with children and adults, management consulting, and a particular subspecialty in camp psychology. We thank Dr. Muchnick for his guidance and generous assistance with this project. Additional information was provided by the Insurance Institute of America and the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) “Play it Safe” program.

### About Markel ...

Markel Insurance Company offers a comprehensive range of insurance programs and coverages to businesses that serve children, including children's camps, 4-H clubs, Boys' and Girls' Clubs, YM/YWCAs, child care centers, nursery schools, private schools, dance schools, martial arts studios, gymnastics studios and health clubs. With the goal of promoting a safe and healthy environment for children, the Company applies its many years of experience to the development of risk management tools and loss control services for its customers.

Markel Insurance Company is a subsidiary of Richmond, Virginia-based Markel Corporation (NYSE: MKL) which markets and underwrites specialty products and programs to a variety of niche markets. In each of the markets it serves, the Company seeks to provide quality products and excellent customer service so that it can be a market leader.



## It's all about safety

Safety is your primary goal. It's ours, too. The best way to keep kids safe is to prevent accidents from happening in the first place. Markel's Safety 1st Education program and risk-management experts can show you how. The program includes:

- Safety 1st publications
- Risk management newsletter series
- Training
- Program and facility assessments
- Seminars
- Analysis of loss trends

Please explore our web sites, [www.campinsurance.com](http://www.campinsurance.com) and [www.childcareinsurance.com](http://www.childcareinsurance.com), to find out more about our programs, or call us at **800-431-1270**.

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