

Protecting Your Child from Abuse at Child Care Centers

Parents often strive, desperately, to protect their children from abuse in child care centers. Yet we hear, too often, of children victimized by abusive teachers and aides.

We want to arm you with information to protect your child from abuse. For more than a dozen years our law firm has worked closely with parents, researched best practices in protecting children, secured access to and scoured thousands of pages of internal child care center and law enforcement documents, worked with police and security experts, and interviewed and taken depositions of teachers and directors.

Through that process we have learned how and why children are vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse, and want to share that information with parents so that you can research and carefully evaluate potential child care providers to determine if they have strong and effective policies and procedures in place to protect children. Here are 8 rules to remember and to measure child care centers against.

1 The Rule of Two

The single most effective means to stop abuse in its tracks is the presence of another adult in the room. Combined with effective training about good touch-bad touch (see below) and mandatory reporting of abuse, a caring, observant teacher concerned about mistreatment can identify it quickly and protect children. What can parents do? ***Ask whether the center mandates that two adults will be present in a room, irrespective of compliance with child/teacher "ratios." Then insist on a tour to see if the center complies.***

In our experience, the single most vulnerable time is naptime, when lights are turned low, and the teacher often leaves her classroom with one aide in charge.

2 Training to Stop Abuse

Training can arm and motivate teachers who suspect abuse to stop it. But child care centers must prioritize prevention of abuse—token webinars won't do. Effective training sets clear boundaries preventing bad touches, teachers must understand and enforce them, children must know them, and teachers must be told, in clear terms, that failing to report any suspected abuse is a crime ([Virginia Code § 63.2-1509](#)). Teachers are not expected to investigate—leave that to law enforcement and CPS professionals. ***Ask child care centers when suspected abuse should be reported, how, and to whom.***

3 Who Are They Hiring?

Inadequate background checks spell trouble. In one of our cases, a large regional child care center hired an aide who lied about his experience and lied about his criminal record—and in ways that were easily discovered. He abused two children and was caught fleeing at the Canadian border. ***Ask the center whom they hire, how they hire and what they pay.*** If they pay minimum wage, they will attract less well trained, less well qualified individuals.

Peter Everett, Robert Stoney, Chidi James, Amy Bradley, and Barkley Horn proudly represent children in seeking civil justice and accountability when wronged by child care centers.

<https://www.blankingshipandkeith.com/practices/justice-crime-victims-inadequate-security-litigation>.

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Has the Center Engaged in Practices That Endanger Children?

Research the history of the center! Virginia makes it easy to check on the history of child care centers, revealing their history of violations—violations that range from minor to red flags (<https://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/cc2.cgi>). Watch out for prior instances of physical or sexual abuse, improper discipline, violations of child-teacher ratios and inadequate background checks, to name a few. If your child has food allergies, look for unsafe food handling practices.

5

Eyes On—Security Cameras

Security cameras are no panacea, but they help and can deter crime—if they are monitored in real time, recorded, reviewed later, and teachers know that. **Ask who monitors cameras and ask to see them in action. Ask how they are used and how long footage is kept. Ask if you will be able to watch your daughter or son remotely, to check on them.**

6

Blind Spots Shielded from In-Person or Electronic Surveillance

In one tragic case, a child care center positioned a fully enclosed, non-transparent tunnel slide facing the back of the playground. The security cameras system could not view the tunnel's exit, nor could other teachers unless they camped out nearby. The perpetrator, a male aide, used the shielded slide to abuse children for months, if not years, before detection. If the center had simply rotated the slide 180 degrees, the slide's exit could have been seen on camera, by teachers inside the school, and more readily by other teachers in playground. The opaque slide itself, spelled trouble—not only for abuse, but if a child hid in it or suffered injuries inside. **Look for traps like that on your child center tour. Ask if there are areas the cameras do not visualize—and why.**

In several cases we have been involved in, perpetrators assaulted children in classrooms by situating victims behind large pieces of furniture, shielding themselves from scrutiny. No teacher should be permitted to hide children from view, and especially during naptime.

7

Don't Trust Promises—Verify

Child care centers may promise the world to parents—after all they can expect to charge as much as \$20,000 or more annually in tuition for each child they enroll (<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/office-for-children/ccar/learn-more>). They may promise two adults will be in each room, that security cameras are installed, are closely monitored, and that teachers are carefully background-checked.

In one of the cases our firm has handled, the parents of a four-year-old toured the school and had been assured that two teachers would always be present in the classroom and that security cameras monitored each classroom. Both were lies.

Try to verify promises (a) in an initial tour, (b) in observing remotely, and (c) in unannounced drop-ins.

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ABC—Always Believe [Your] Children

Finally, believe your children. In two heart-breaking cases we have represented children who revealed to their parents that they had been abused, the parents inquired, and the child care center covered up abuse—in one case lying about what the security camera footage revealed. **If your child complains of abuse, call law enforcement or CPS—immediately.**