

BANANAS HANDOUT

Safety Factors To Check For In Your Family Child Care Home

(written for providers but useful for parents as well)

When applying for a family child care license, you promise to make your home safe for children. A licensing analyst will visit to determine your home's safety. Visits can also take place any time after a license is issued – especially if someone registers a complaint with the licensing office. Following are some of the most common safety requirements the licensing analyst will check for:

Your Licensed Capacity: You should never have more children in care than you are licensed for. An assistant caregiver needs to be present when required. Children must be supervised at all times, including when they are playing outside. Your licensing analyst will require you to stop caring for some children if you exceed your licensed capacity. See our Handout "*How Many Children Can Be Cared For In Licensed Family Child Care Homes?*" for more information. Our Handouts are available by mail, at our office or by downloading from our website.

Potential Poisons: Many everyday items are poisonous. All detergents, cleaning compounds, mouthwashes, medicines, toxic plants and other potential poisons must be kept out of reach of children. Even if you never took these precautions when your own children were young, you are required by the regulations to do so if you have a family child care license. Poisons must be in a locked cabinet (make sure that "childproof" latches really are childproof) or on a shelf which is *well out of reach*. Keep the Poison Control System's phone number, (800) 876-4766, near your phone.

Firearms: If you have guns of any type, they must be locked in a cupboard or container which has a key lock. Ammunition must be in a separate, locked container.

Fireplaces and Heaters: Fireplaces, open-faced heaters and wood-burning stoves must be screened off so that children won't accidentally fall against them and burn themselves. (See our Handout, "*Safety Grids for Heaters*," on how to build grids for floor and wall furnaces.) Gas heaters must be properly vented and permanently installed. Stove burners and open ovens should never be used for heating the house.

Employees: You must make sure to have criminal record clearance and child abuse index checks for all adults who live or work in your home.

Stairs: Stairs must be barricaded or fenced off whenever you care for children under five years of age. Do not use accordion or folding gates; children have been injured by becoming caught in them. Mesh gates are acceptable.

Outdoor Play Area: Yards need not be fenced (unless they're next to canals, cliffs and similar hazards) but children need to be supervised at all times. Use a portable phone outside so you can continuously watch the children or get help if needed. Clear outdoor play areas of any low-hanging tree branches or prickly shrubbery which might be a hazard to children. Any fishponds, swimming pools etc. which cannot be emptied must be *absolutely inaccessible* (covered or fenced). Keep poisonous plants away from children. For a list of common poisonous plants, such as azalea, Chinese lantern, foxglove and lobelia, go to www.calpoison.org/public/plants-toxic.html.

Space and Equipment: You are required to have adequate space, toys and equipment for the children in care. The licensing analyst will ask where the children nap or rest. You should have enough regular beds, cots, mats or cribs for all children. Infants should be in cribs, not in regular beds. To prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, always place babies younger than 12 months old on their back to sleep. Do not use pillows, bulky quilts, sheepskin or bumper pads in the crib. You will also need high chairs or feeding tables for infants in your care.

Call the local office of the Consumer Products Safety Commission, (510)637-4050, or visit www.cpsc.gov for the Commission's excellent safety handouts, including "*The Safe Nursery: A Booklet to Help Avoid Injuries from Nursery Furniture and Equipment*." For more safety information about toys or equipment, call the Commission, (800)638-2772, or check the website. Babywalkers, bouncers and jumpers cannot be used for children in care and should be kept out of reach of children.

Discipline: Corporal punishment (spanking or hitting a child) is not permitted in child care. In addition, the regulations forbid unusual punishment such as humiliation, mental abuse or punishment that interferes with eating, sleeping or using the toilet.

Food: Food brought from home must be labeled with the child's name and properly stored. Children need to be offered a meal or a snack at least every three hours.

Cleanliness, Heating and Ventilation: Your home has to be reasonably clean and have adequate heating and ventilation. Smoking is not permitted while children are in care.

Emergency Equipment: You are required to have a fire extinguisher (buy a 2A10BC or larger), a smoke detector and a functioning telephone.

Emergency Information: You must have an emergency card for each child in care. The card should contain the child's full name; birthdate; the name, phone number and location of the parent or responsible adult to contact in an emergency; the name and phone number of the child's physician; and the parent's authorization for you to seek emergency care if you can't reach the parent. (While not required, information on food or drug allergies or special physical conditions of children in your care should be included on this card.) Call BANANAS for a sample form or download one at www.bananasinc.org. Keep the emergency cards in a file which you can easily find and take with you in an emergency. Also keep on file the names of other family members or friends to contact if the parent can't be reached and the names of persons authorized to pick up the child. Your licensing analyst will review your emergency cards and will also review whether your first aid and CPR cards are valid and you have taken the required health and safety course.

Additional Required Information: You are required to keep an ongoing roster of children who have been in your care. The licensing analyst may ask to see this roster. It should contain, at least, the names of children you have cared for in the last three years, the dates they were enrolled, the names and addresses of their parents and their home phone numbers. You also must have immunization forms ("blue cards"), as well as liability insurance or affidavits from your parents indicating that they know you do not carry liability insurance.

Transportation Safety: You need to post current car and booster seat regulations. A pamphlet is available from Community Care Licensing (pub #269, or download at www.dss.cahwnet.gov/pdf/PUB269.pdf). Make sure your drivers' license is current, your car is safe and seating capacity is not exceeded. Call Alameda County's Injury Prevention unit, (510) 618-2048, for additional car seat information or see our "*Buckle Up – Be Safe!*" Handout.

Disaster Plans: You are required to have a disaster plan stating what you will do in the event of an earthquake, fire or other emergency. See BANANAS' Handouts "*How to Write a Disaster Plan*," "*Earthquake Safety*" and "*Family Fire Safety*" for more information. Fire/disaster drills have to be held every six months.

Health Policies: Evaluate each child for illness daily. Separate children who appear contagious. For more information, see the following BANANAS' Handouts: "*In Sickness and In Health*" (how to write illness policies), "*Giving*

Medications in Child Care Programs" and "*Promoting Health and Hygiene in a Child Care Setting*" (safe diapering, food handling and hand washing practices).

Additional Safety Suggestions: These precautions are not required by the licensing office, but will help you insure the safety of children in your care:

- Remove breakables from reach in rooms where children play (such as glass ash trays, table lamps, etc.)
- Cover all unused electrical outlets with safety caps available at hardware stores.
- Place a high latch on outside doors or on doors of rooms you don't want the children to enter.
- Set your water heater at a temperature between 105 ° F and 120 ° F to prevent accidental scalding or turn off the hot water at the sink where children wash their hands.
- Keep plastic bags or wrappings out of small children's reach. Never use them to store toys or diapers or for liners in cribs.
- Check the floor daily for small objects that children could choke on (pennies, bobby pins, buttons or popped balloons.) Toys should be too big to be swallowed and be cleaned frequently.
- Never leave a small child alone in a tub or sink or on a changing table.
- Always empty water that collects in buckets outside and keep the toilets off-limits for toddlers who can tumble head-first into the water and drown.
- Remove heavy lids from toy boxes or chests.
- Cribs with high corner posts have been recalled. Contact the Consumer Products Safety Commission, (800) 638-2772, or www.cpsc.gov, for additional recall information. Slats in cribs should be no further apart than 2 3/8 inches.
- Once toddlers are old enough to climb out of their cribs, they should be napping on mats or cots.
- Never keep an unused refrigerator or freezer anywhere on your property unless the door is removed or sealed shut so a child cannot get trapped inside.
- Playground surfacing should be at least 12 inches of wood chips, mulch, sand or pea gravel or mats made of safety-tested rubber or rubberlike materials.
- Be sure mini-blinds and venetian blinds do not have looped cords. Cut the end of the loop or use drapery cords that have tension or tie-down devices to prevent strangulation.
- Be sure there are no drawstrings around the hood and neck of children's outerwear that can catch on equipment and cause strangulation.