CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS
RISK MANAGEMENT

SAFETY MATTERS

RISK MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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NATIONAL CHILD SAFETY AND PROTECTION MONTH: GENERAL SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

OBJECTIVE: November is National Child Safety and Protection Month, a nationwide effort to promote awareness of the potential hazards that students may face in everyday situations, as well as how to react to—or prevent—emergency situations.

National Child Safety and Protection Month is an important reminder for schools, parents, and communities to unite in promoting child and young adult safety. Whether it's elementary, middle, high school, or community college, each age group faces unique risks that require tailored safety strategies. This month emphasizes the importance of child safety across various settings — from outdoor activities to online interactions, and from the school bus to professional interactions. The goal is to raise awareness and educate parents, caregivers, teachers, and communities on how to create a safer environment for all.

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TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

Bicycle and Helmet Safety

Cycling is a popular activity for children and young adults, whether it's a leisurely ride, commuting to school, or navigating college campuses. Wearing a helmet is essential to prevent head injuries, with research showing that helmets can reduce the risk of head injury by up to 85%. During a typical fall or collision, much of the impact energy is absorbed by the helmet, rather than your head and brain. It is essential to adopt a safety culture at a school site or college campus by being aware of safety precautions and wearing a helmet when riding to school.

School Bus Safety

Student safety should be the top priority when determining school bus routes and stops. While riding a school bus remains the safest way to travel to school, mitigating safety risks throughout the school bus journey is essential to making this the case. Determining bus routes and stops that effectively reduce student safety risks and meet operational goals takes planning. Many people and organizations are involved with safe school bus routes, such as school administration, the transportation department, local law enforcement, and even parents and board members.

Planning safer bus routes and stops involves processes that incorporate consideration for each of the following aspects of school travel:

- **Motorist Safety Awareness:** Motorist can practice safe driving around school buses. Responsible drivers evaluate and assess their driving skills and abilities on an ongoing basis.
- **Route Planning:** Student safety should be the top priority when determining school bus routes and stops.
- **Behavior Management:** Monitoring student behavior on the school bus reduces distractions for the driver and makes for a safer environment on the ride to and from school.

PLAYGROUND SAFETY

Playgrounds are essential spaces for a younger student's development and fun, providing a healthy outlet for their energy while fostering emotional, social, and cognitive skills. Outdoor playgrounds offer a crucial balance to indoor activities, promoting physical activity and exploration. However, without a comprehensive playground safety program encompassing regular inspection and maintenance, these spaces can pose significant risks. Implementing strict safety measures is paramount to ensuring that playgrounds remain safe environments for learning and playing.

When developing a program, the following areas should be considered:

- Selecting the right playground equipment and surfacing.
- Playground maintenance and hazard inspections.
- Posting and enforcement of playground rules and;
- Ensuring adequate training for staff tasked with playground supervision.

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BULLYING PREVENTION & INTERNET SAFETY

Bully Prevention

Bullying is a serious issue that affects students of all ages, from K-12 through community college. As a form of abuse, bullying can have long-lasting emotional and psychological effects. It can manifest in various ways, including physical violence, verbal harassment, and social exclusion. It's crucial for parents, educators, and school staff to intervene early, equipping students with the tools to recognize, report, and respond to bullying in a healthy way.

Students should be taught that resorting to violence or becoming a bully themselves is never the solution. Instead, they should learn positive strategies for dealing with conflict. Schools can also draw on resources from Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a framework that helps foster a safe and supportive school environment by promoting students' academic, social, emotional, and mental well-being. As well as standards for appropriate student conduct. By working together, we can ensure that every student feels safe and valued, both inside and outside the classroom.

Internet Safety

The internet is an invaluable tool for learning and can make everyday tasks more manageable. However, when not used responsibly, it also poses risks. It's crucial for adults—whether parents, teachers, or caregivers—to stay informed about the websites students visit, the content they encounter, and who they interact with online.

Adhering to school board policies and guidelines around internet use is essential in creating a safe online environment where students can benefit from digital resources without exposing themselves to unnecessary dangers.

To further enhance online safety, here are some effective strategies to protect students in the digital world:

- **Set strong privacy settings:** Encourage parents to use parental controls to limit access to inappropriate sites and ensure children are only engaging with age-appropriate content.
- **Cyberbullying awareness:** Talk to children about the risks of cyberbullying and encourage them to report any uncomfortable online interactions to an adult.
- **Safe social media use:** Teach students how to use social media responsibly, the importance of privacy, and the need to protect their personal information.
- **Personal security:** Remind students to be cautious about sharing personal information online, especially on public forums or social media platforms.
- **Mental health and social media:** Address the emotional toll that social media can have on young adults and promote healthy online habits. Encourage students to seek help if they experience online harassment or bullying.

BACKPACK SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Going to school and being a student means having to carry a backpack with all your essentials. Being loaded down with textbooks and supplies can make backpacks heavy and hard to wear. If they are not worn properly, backpacks may cause back, neck and shoulder pain in students of varying age groups. To avoid long term health issues, it is never too early to start safe habits that can decrease the likelihood of strains and pain.

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BACKPACK SAFETY (Cont'd)

Below are some tips on how to choose the best school backpack for students:

- **Correct size:** Bigger is not necessarily better. The more room there is in a backpack, the more a student will carry and the heavier the backpack will become. Make sure to choose the backpack that best suits a student's needs. The bag you choose should be proportional to a student's height.
- **Has two broad, padded shoulder straps:** Having adjustable straps that are broad and distribute weight evenly between both shoulders is important. More padding does not translate to less pain. Both straps should stay even in length. Non padded straps can be uncomfortable and dig into a student's shoulders.
- **Has a padded back:** This can provide increased comfort when the backpack is appropriately fitted and close to their back. It also protects them from being poked by sharp objects or edges (pencils, rulers, notebooks, etc.) inside the pack.
- **Includes a waist belt or chest strap:** Belts and straps help redistribute the weight of the backpack more evenly across the body.
- **Look for backpacks with compartments:** These can help evenly distribute the weight of contents throughout the backpack.

ADULT/STUDENT BOUNDARIES AND VISITOR MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Creating a safe and respectful environment for students involves setting clear professional boundaries between adults and students, as well as establishing effective visitor management protocols. Both are essential to maintaining the integrity of the school environment and protecting students from potential harm.

Maintaining professional relationships with adult interactions with students is crucial and should be focused on the educational or mentoring role. Clear guidelines about acceptable behavior for both students and adults should be reflected in the districts policies and procedures. Regular training should be provided for staff, volunteers, and even students on recognizing and respecting personal boundaries.

Security measures such as visitor management systems should be implemented to provide an additional layer of safety. Schools should have a strict and clearly communicated policy on who is allowed to visit the campus and under what circumstances. The policies and procedures should include check-in procedures, including identification and visitor badges, to ensure that only authorized individuals can enter certain areas. For frequent visitors, especially volunteers or those who will have direct interaction with students, conducting background checks is essential to ensure safety. This applies to volunteers, contractors, and even certain community partners who work closely with students

RESOURCES

Safety Kids - Child Safety
Consumer Product Safety Commission - Helmet Safety
National Safety Council - Child Safety
Registry Partners - Child Protection / Safety
Orange County Sheriff Department - Child Safety Month
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: Planning Safer School Bus Stops and Routes
California Department of Education: Bullying Prevention Training & Resources
Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools: Strategies for Preventing and Addressing Adult Sexual Misconduct in Schools

This California Schools JPA fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice.