Developing Infectious Disease Policies

The world we live in today has caused the church to look at many of our ministries in a new and different way. One of those ministries is the work we do with preschoolers and their families. In addition to the usual preschool policies, churches today are becoming aware of the need to formulate policies referring to hygiene and infectious diseases, child safety, and the preventing of child sexual abuse.

Each of these is very serious and must be dealt with carefully. Several factors to remember when developing As policies are the health and safety of each child, the legal issues involved, and the reputation of the church.

What is the church to do? Begin by having concerned, knowledgeable, and committed people in the preschool division. A preschool division director may become concerned about issues involved in preventing infectious diseases.

A minister of preschool education may lead out in investigating the need for an infectious disease policy. Or, a parent may raise concerns leading to policies.

How do we accomplish the task? A committee or work group should be formed with the responsibility of developing policies to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, and to improve and maintain safety and hygiene for preschoolers in the church. The committee or work group could include a preschool parent, a preschool worker, a doctor (and other medical persons in the church), as well as preschool division director, and preschool minister or another staff member.

The policies could include the following:

1. When a child (appearing ill) can and cannot be accepted.

2. Procedures when a child becomes ill during a session.

3. Giving of medication (prescription, over-the-counter).

4. When and how toys, equipment, and teaching materials will be sanitized.

5. Hand washing by all those working with preschoolers.

6. When rubber gloves are to be used.

7. Procedures for diapering and disposal of soiled diapers.

8. A listing of what constitutes illness or when a child cannot be accepted (can be obtained from the Committee on Control of Infectious Diseases of the American Academy of Pediatrics, or other sources).

As the committee comes together:

1. Determine goals and deadlines for your work. Set dates for future meetings.

2. Assign Members to gather specific information, such as contacting other churches for samples of their hygiene and safety policies.

3. Invite a doctor to speak to the committee on this subject notifying all members and ask them to be present. One doctor, when asked to do this in his church, gathered information from other doctors as well.

One statement he made was invaluable to preschool workers. He said, "We should treat every germ as a potentially dangerous one."

4. After much discussion, sharing of ideas, study, and several meetings, put the policies into written form.

5. Share them with others who work with preschoolers. The policies may need to be revised by the group several times.

Remember that the more people involved in a project like this, the more they will feel an ownership in the final decision. Following guidelines is easier when people feel they have had a part in determining them.

6. It is important to carry the policies through the proper channels for church approval. Print copies and have them available. Being able to refer to church approval will add credibility to the policies and support to those who will be responsible for helping everyone abide by them.

7. When approved by the church, print enough copies for every preschool worker, every preschool family, and for future workers and families. See that all program leaders and church staff have a copy.

8. See that the policies are well understood by all who will use the preschool facilities. Be sure that necessary supplies (soap, rubber gloves, proper changing materials, etc.) are available. Preschool workers will want to be the first ones to follow all guidelines of the church policies.

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