# Vacation Bible School Safety

A common activity each year for churches is Vacation Bible School (VBS). It is typically a week of fun, learning and ministry for your church's youngest members. However, it also is important to consider the safety of all individuals involved with this program. Between your staff and volunteers, food preparation, safety outside the building and First Aid, there is a lot to consider when making VBS a safe space.

## *Staff and Volunteers*

There are numerous adults being entrusted with the care of children during VBS. In order to protect the children attending your VBS, it is importance to utilize proper background checks for all employees and volunteers. This process will assist your church in hiring or approving capable VBS workers. It's best to consult with an attorney regarding what criminal offenses disqualify someone from working at VBS, but generally any offenses involving children and any sexual offenses or crimes of violence would preclude someone from being a VBS worker.

While the safety of children is a main priority, it also is important to consider the well-being of your staff and volunteers as well. Taking steps to prevent harassment between adults is important in creating an all-around safe environment. Consider adopting the following safeguards to prevent your organization from experiencing a sexual harassment allegation:

- Clearly articulate that sexual misconduct or harassment of any kind will not be tolerated.
- Have written and posted policies that clearly define what constitutes sexual harassment.
- Conduct initial training for new workers and ongoing training for employees and volunteers.

## *Food Concerns*

A common element of VBS is providing food or snacks. However, it is important to consider how you prepare and serve food, as well as being ready to handle a possible allergic reaction.

- **Preparation** – Cleanliness is vital when handling and preparing food. Always make sure your employees and volunteers have washed their hands before serving food. When beginning to prepare foods, ensure you are not using expired products by checking the "use by" date on all foods. Wash fruits and vegetables with cold water before serving.
- **Serving** – Separate utensils should be used for each food item when serving, and disposable gloves should be worn when handling ready-to-eat foods without utensils. If you are serving food indoors, food should not be left out for more than two hours. If you are serving outdoors, and the temperature is above 90 degrees Fahrenheit, food should not be left out for more than one hour.
- **Allergies** – Because of the potential for allergies, avoid foods that are most associated with allergic reactions in children such peanuts, tree nuts, and dairy products. Consider utilizing a health and emergency contact information form for VBS participants so that your staff and volunteers are made aware of children with food allergies. In the event of a reaction, the first step is to recognize the symptoms. Some symptoms include hives, eczema, redness of skin around the eyes, itchy mouth or ear canal, vomiting, diarrhea or stomach pain, swelling of lips, tongue or throat obstructing airways, shortness of breath

or loss of consciousness. When responding to an allergic reaction, it is a good idea to contact authorities for proper medical attention. Certain individuals may carry an EpiPen for use in the event of an allergic reaction; thus, your health and emergency contact form should indicate it is good idea to educate employees and volunteers on the use of an EpiPen in the event of a serious allergic reaction.

## Outside Activities

In order to create a fun and enjoying atmosphere for children during VBS, many activities are held outdoors. When setting up outside, consider the following:

- Move all cords (speakers, microphones, etc.) away from walkways. At the very least, cords should be held down and visibly marked with colored tape.
- Mark and protect all stakes and ropes for large, outdoor tents.
- Depressions and holes in grassy areas should either be filled or visibly marked. Consider planning activities away from any such hazards.
- Make sure that any temporary (folding) tables and chairs being used are sturdy and free from defects.
- Monitor weather reports and make alternative plans in case the weather appears threatening.

## First Aid

Before your church's VBS begins, make sure your First Aid kit is well-stocked and up to date. Additionally, consider training staff and volunteers about basic First Aid and CPR. These steps can be effective ways to adequately prepare for any medical situation that could occur. Taking the time to create a plan with specific steps, according to specific medical situations, can mean the difference between the incident staying minor or developing into a crisis.

## Additional Information

For more information and additional resources, visit SafeChurch.com, and view the following fact sheets relating to VBS safety:

- Background Checks: How to Perform a Check and Use the Results
- Preparing, Serving, and Storing Food Safely
- Festival Safety

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