



# OH&S TIP SHEET

Health and Safety in Early Childhood Services

## Talking about health and safety

Workplaces that encourage employees and employers to talk and consult around occupational health and safety issues are safer workplaces.

### WHY TALK ABOUT OH&S

While there is a legal obligation<sup>1</sup> to consult with employees about matters that effect their health and safety, this shouldn't be the only reason employees and employers have conversations. Research shows that where employees feel they have a say in OH&S, accident rates are lower to those where employees are not involved<sup>2</sup>. In addition talking about OH&S demonstrates that it is a priority and that staff safety matters.

Employees influence health and safety through their own work practices and actions. They are often the best people to understand the risks in their workplace. Talking, listening and acting together about OH&S can help you to;

- Identify joint solutions to problems
- Create a more positive health and safety outlook where risks are managed sensibly
- Reduce accidents and ill health
- Comply with legal requirements

### HOW AND WHEN TO TALK

Look for opportunities to talk about health and safety. The law<sup>1</sup> states you need to consult with employees when you contemplate introducing any change that may have an impact on health and safety. As an employer you need to acknowledge that staff mostly think about OH&S from the perspective of children, not their own.

At staff meetings and committee meetings make sure that OH&S is a permanent agenda item.

When you think about introducing new pieces of equipment, whether for the children or for employees, as staff about what they think the impact might be on health and safety both for themselves and the children.

Ask them if they can foresee any problems with the storage of any new equipment.

Having conversations about health and safety should not be about catching people out and telling them they are not working safely. Instead start a conversation by asking



questions. Such as 'Is that the safest way to do that?' or 'Is there another way to do that?'

Give positive feedback when you see someone doing the right thing or using equipment appropriately. Don't just concentrate on the negative.

Look for opportunities to make OH&S part of your daily conversations at the workplace.

<sup>1</sup> Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 s 35 and 36

<sup>2</sup> HSE Fit3 employer and employee surveys 2005/6 UK Journal of Industrial Relations; 49:211-225