

How is Your Facility Designed to Keep Children Safe?¹

Child development and school-age programs operate in many different types of facilities. Your program might operate within a dedicated Child Development Center (CDC), in a renovated elementary school, a community center, or a variety of other settings. Regardless of floor plan or design elements, all programs share several key characteristics that protect children from harm. These features promote visibility and enable active supervision of children at all times (depending on the age and design of your facility, it may not have all of these features):

In CDCs:

- € There are windows in the doors to all rooms and areas used to care for children (except for adult and school-age toilet rooms), allowing activities in the room to be viewed from outside the room.
- € There are vision panels between activity rooms and hallways to provide visual access.
- € Doors on toilet stalls are removed, except for toilets used by children over age 5 and adults; or there are half walls that allow line of sight supervision for children under age 5.
- € Walls around toilet stalls are reduced to half the normal height, if possible, to permit better viewing of toilet areas.
- € Storage areas are designed so the hardware on the doors is operable from both sides. Doors on closets can be opened from the inside without a key. This prevents a child from being locked in a closet or storage area. In some Services, vision panels are required in the doors for all storage areas.
- € There are no draperies or blinds that obstruct the view into areas in which children receive care or areas where someone might take a child. Art work is not hung on windows.
- € There are sinks for handwashing in activity rooms rather than in toilet areas so children can be observed more easily.
- € Diapering areas are separated from activity rooms by either half walls or walls with glass. Ideally, buildings are constructed with no walls between diapering areas and activity rooms to increase visibility of caregivers and children during diapering.
- € Crib or sleeping areas are located in activity rooms. If the design of the building prevents this arrangement, crib or sleeping areas are separated from activity rooms by half walls or walls with glass.
- € Concave mirrors are installed where needed to improve visibility.
- € Rooms used for evening care are located near the front door so staff and parents have easy access.
- € Outdoor play areas are constructed so all parts can be viewed from inside the center and from outside the playground fencing. There are windows in the walls between activity rooms and outdoor play areas to permit viewing of both areas.
- € Doors to storage areas are visible from the main building so they can be visually monitored by adults other than those on the playground.

¹ Virtual Lab School: (<https://www.virtuallabschool.org/tcs/child-abuse-prevention/lesson-5>)

- € Play structures such as lofts and play houses are built so that children can be viewed while at play in the structure.
- € Closed circuit television systems are installed and allow staff members, managers, T&Cs, and families to monitor program activities.

In School-Age programs:

- € All program areas (rooms, hallways, parking lots, and outdoors spaces) are well-lit and visibility is good enough that staff members can supervise all spaces easily.
- € Storage areas are designed so the hardware on the doors is operable from both sides. Doors on closets can be opened from the inside without a key. This prevents a child from being locked in a closet or storage area. In some Services, vision panels are required in the doors for all storage areas. This prevents children from entering unsafe spaces with each other or an adult who means harm.
- € Closed circuit television systems are installed and allow staff members, managers, T&Cs, and families to monitor program activities.
- € There are no draperies or blinds that obstruct the view into areas in which children receive care or areas where someone might take a child.
- € Concave mirrors are installed where needed to improve visibility around corners or into difficult-to-see spaces.
- € Doors to outdoor storage areas are visible from the main building so they can be visually monitored by adults other than those on the playground.

There are additional design elements that help ensure children are safe. According to Koralek's guide to preventing child abuse and neglect in center settings (1993), these include:

- € The reception desk is located so that the entrance can be viewed by reception desk staff.
- € Large centers have alarms on all exit doors that do not open onto a play area.
- € Centers have alarms on all exit doors, other than the main entrance and the kitchen exterior entrance, that do not open to a fenced area.
- € A system at the main entrance, such as a buzzer system, restricts entry to the building at night when only a few caregiving employees are on duty.