

DAY CARE CAN BE A DANGEROUS PLACE

It is unfortunate that those most vulnerable to harm are often the ones at the highest risk for abuse or neglect. Elderly persons confined to nursing homes, the mentally ill, and the terminally ill are often targets for abuse or the victims of neglect. To this list, add one more group: children in day care. While the vast majority of day care facilities and day care providers are trustworthy and responsible, cases of abuse or neglect do occur.

The good news is that such abuse or neglect may be preventable. Put into practice some of the suggestions below to ensure your child is safer in day care.

Before enrolling a child in day care, visit the facility. Drop by without an appointment so you can see how the center operates when it is not expecting outside visitors. (Do this periodically after your child is enrolled as well.)

In Wyoming, day care providers are *not required* to carry insurance, so ask your day care provider if they have insurance coverage, and ask how much. Ask how discipline is handled at the day care facility—when children may be disciplined, by whom, and how. Make sure that the children being cared for appear to be relaxed, happy, and engaged in constructive activities such as learning or play.

Take steps to guard your child against dangers that could occur outside the facility. If the children are taken on field trips, check for safe transportation and how many adults typically accompany the children on outings.

Find out the day care center's policies about having children picked up at the end of the day, and identify – in writing – who is allowed to take your child from the facility. Find out what will be done if your child becomes seriously ill while at the day care facility, and what steps will be taken if the facility cannot get in touch with you immediately.

Take additional steps to ensure that your child is not the victim of intentional abuse (as opposed to neglect) while he or she is at the day care facility. When you visit, ensure the bathrooms do not contain areas where children can be isolated, and find out how the facility handles toileting issues. Also make sure that children are well supervised during naptime. Ensure that parents are welcome in all areas of the facility and ask about caregiver training. Find out what kind of screening (criminal, psychological, substance abuse) is done on employees and volunteers.

It is important that any contact is strictly supervised between the children and those not

working at the facility, including relatives of the daycare provider (adults and children) who may live in the home where the day care operates, for example.

Keep your eyes open for the warning signs of abuse or neglect, such as:

- Unexplained bruises or other injuries, especially if recurring.
- Frequent crying before the child is taken to day care.
- Unusual emotional behavior, ranging from complete emotional withdrawal to being overly “clingy” or extremely fearful.
- Bleeding or bruising or the child’s asking to wear additional layers of unnecessary clothing to day care.

If you suspect that your child has been abused or neglected at a day care facility, act promptly. If your child is old enough, try talking with him or her to find out what happened. See if other parents who use the same day care have noticed similar signs of abuse or neglect in their kids. If you still suspect something is wrong, contact the local authorities.

Over the past several years, my firm has had various inquiries from individuals whose family members have been harmed in day care centers and nursing homes. In Wyoming, neither type of facility is required to carry insurance. While we must all carry insurance to drive our cars, Wyoming does not require the facilities where our elderly and children are cared for to have insurance in case something goes wrong. If this concerns you, consider bringing it up with your Wyoming legislator.

Nothing in this article should be construed as legal advice. You must consult with an attorney for the application of the law to your specific circumstances.

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