GUIDE
High-Risk Spaces

INTRODUCTION

Spaces that provide socially acceptable opportunities to observe or interact with unclothed or partially-clothed children, as well as spaces in which children sleep, are considered **high-risk spaces**. Examples of high-risk spaces include gyms, changing rooms, bathrooms, sleeping quarters, infirmiries, and *mikvahs*. While some individuals may seek out these venues as a cover to perpetrate abuse, others may simply take advantage of the access these spaces can grant to youth.

Whether these spaces are mixed use, so that adults and children utilize them jointly (e.g., community center locker room), or designated for youth-only use (e.g., a student bathroom), consider ways in which you can protect children and teens by increasing your safeguards. We have outlined four key safeguards below, with recommendations and examples for implementing them.

MAXIMIZE VISIBILITY WHILE PROTECTING PRIVACY

In the *Guide: Introduction to Core Assessment Principles*, we advise maximizing visibility in all spaces. You should apply the same principles in high-risk spaces but with the concurrent need to ensure privacy. This means that while spaces should be visible enough to see whether and how many people are inside, they should also be designed to promote bodily privacy.

For example, bathroom stalls should maximize visibility by having stall doors that do not extend all the way to the floor, leaving feet visible to show how many people are in a stall. They should also protect the privacy of users (e.g., no large cracks between the doors; urinals should have partitions or not be used at all), which reduces the risks of children being observed in the intimate act of using

Best Practice 4
Assess your Space

Goal 2
Assess your Physical and Virtual Space

Objective
Discuss safeguards that can be added to promote safety in your organization's high-risk spaces.

Audience
Child Safety Committee and relevant program or maintenance/grounds staff

Time
45-60 minutes to read and discuss

the bathroom and of adults intentionally exposing themselves to children or initiating inappropriate conversation.

For shower areas, maximize visibility by using shower curtains that don't reach the floor or that have transparent panels at the bottom but protect privacy by making sure the curtain extends all the way across the shower stall. In addition, gyms, pools, and *mikvahs* should provide towels large enough to adequately cover bodies of different sizes, thus further protecting privacy.

The same logic for bathroom stalls and showers also applies to changing rooms, which can be misused if they are fully open. Provide partial stalls, curtains, or dividers so that people can change privately even as someone outside can see how many people are in the stall.

INCREASE SUPERVISION

One way to help ensure that your efforts to maximize visibility are effective is through supervision.

The recommended safeguard for interactions with youth is to have two adults present or to have the interaction be observable and interruptible (e.g., one on one meeting in an office with a glass door). When dealing with high-risk spaces, you'll want to enhance this safeguard by increasing staff presence further. For example, while visits to the school nurse might ordinarily be conducted with the door ajar and only the nurse and student present, for examinations or injections requiring the child to undress, the door should be closed to protect the child's privacy and a second staff person should be present.

If this is not possible due to limited staff or volunteer capacity, consider combining groups of similar ages in order to have adequate supervision. If increasing staff isn't possible, such as during shower time at camp, make sure that the staff regularly assigned are fully present and aware (i.e., this is not the time for one counselor to check the front office for mail). Finally, in community settings used by both youth and adults (e.g., a JCC, *mikvah*, or synagogue) youth should be supervised by their parent or accompanying adult when not in a formal youth program.

MANAGE ACCESS TO THESE SPACES

The guide, *Introduction to Core Assessment Principles*, introduces the concept of access as a continuum, with the highest levels of safety at either end. Fully restricting a space can serve as a safeguard against its being used inappropriately. Opening access is also a safeguard because it increases interruptibility and minimizes the risk of secret interactions between adults and youth.

These same principles apply to high-risk spaces and may require additional safeguards as well. For instance, if your organization chooses to create open communal access to a high-risk space such as a gym, pool, or *mikvah*, you'll want to establish a system for knowing the identity and, where possible or relevant, the whereabouts of all guests. This might include an attendant who checks people in and out, an automated electronic sign-in or fob key, or something as low-tech as a log-book for signing in and out of the building. Sign-in, identification, and check-out can help organizations know who was in the building at a given time should a disclosure of abuse occur later.

When high-risk facilities or specific areas are not in use, they should be locked, and only a select few highly-screened individuals should have access to the key or knowledge of the security code and should be required to notify others when entering and exiting the space (e.g., board members should notify the synagogue office if using the building for a meeting after hours).

WHEN POSSIBLE, DESIGNATE YOUTH-ONLY AREAS

Reserving separate spaces for youth and adult toileting, changing, or sleeping can act as a safeguard by minimizing situations in which adults and children are in states of partial or full undress together. For example, in schools, students and faculty should have separate bathrooms that are clearly marked with signage. Such separation, though, should not impact the need for adult supervision in these high-risk spaces or you merely trade one risk (adult on child abuse) for another (child on child abuse)[1].

Discussion Questions

1. Of the above suggestions that are applicable to your space, which ones are relatively straightforward to implement, and which ones may take more time, effort, or resources to implement?

2. How might you practically apply these safeguards in your own space?

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[1] This is an important point, given that the US Department of Justice reports that roughly one-third of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by other children. Statistic retrieved from: https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227763.pdf. More recent studies estimate these numbers at more than 75%. Gewirtz-Meydan, A & Finkelhor, D. (2019). Sexual abuse and assault in a large national sample of children and adolescents. Child Maltreatment, 1-12. DOI: 10.1177/10775595/9873975