



## Responding to Reports of Suspicions and Concerns

**F**rom our last Safety Bulletin, your staff learned a five-step process for responding to suspicious or inappropriate behavior by staff, other adults, or program participants. In this bulletin you'll learn a five-step process for how you as an administrator should respond to reports of suspicious or inappropriate behaviors.

A general rule in risk management is that if you respond to small problems, you prevent big problems. Your staff are your eyes and ears in the programs. When they bring

information forward, and you respond appropriately, you are teaching them that you care about what they have to say and that you are true to your "zero tolerance" for abuse policy. Moreover, you may be keeping those you serve from abuse.

### 5 Steps to Take When Problems are Reported

#### 1. Take all reports seriously:

Fortunately most reports do not reveal serious incidents, but it's impossible to know which ones do without responding to all of them. Often the first response to complaints about suspicious behavior is to minimize them, but by taking each report seriously, you have the opportunity to stop behavior that is inappropriate or that could lead to abuse. Keeping your organization safe means responding to all complaints as if they were true. This way, you can avoid the low frequency but high cost event that hurts everyone.

#### 2. Gather information:

The second step is to gather information. For example, if you receive a complaint about an employee, you may begin by reviewing the employee's personnel file to see if he or she has been reported for similar behavior in the past. You may observe the staff or interview other staff and supervisors. You may want to check work schedules for the day and time in question to help verify whether the alleged incident could have occurred as reported and whether the accused was working alone at the time. Check the activity schedules in your building to see what else was happening. Look at staffing ratios, activities, and supervision levels to see if circumstances were ripe for a problem to arise. Be sure that you have a clear statement of the allegation. In

#### IN THIS ISSUE:

- [Responding to Reports of Suspicions and Concerns](#)
- [5 Steps to Take When Problems are Reported](#)
- [In the Spotlight](#)
- [On the Road](#)
- [In the News](#)

#### ONLINE TRAINING

**ARMATUS**<sup>®</sup> an online training program used to teach best practices in preventing sexual abuse. Visit our [website](#) today to review a [demo](#) of the courses or call us directly with any questions.

#### ASK THE EXPERT

Submit your questions on maintaining clear boundaries, preventing false allegations, ways to plan programs and field trips, managing one-on-one situations or any other question you may have.

Email your questions to [experts@praesidiuminc.com](mailto:experts@praesidiuminc.com)

Then watch for next quarter's safety bulletin to see the answers!

short, before you make a decision about how to respond to a report, be sure that you have all the information you need to make a solid decision.

### 3. Document:

Document the report as it was explained to you. If you choose to add comments not relayed by the reporter, clearly delineate your own comments or observations by putting them in a separate section of the document. Continue to document your activities as you gather additional information. Why do this? We forget small details that may be important later if the case reveals actual abuse or results in legal action. Besides, documentation allows you—and others—to review your actions and verify that you responded appropriately.

### 4. Act:

Depending on what you discover while gathering information, you can next decide what action best addresses the situation. You may want to involve others at this point, especially for employee discipline or other serious matters. You may choose any one or several of the following:

- Increase monitoring or supervision of the employee.
- Speak with the employee.
- Retrain the employee.
- Suspend the employee.
- Initiate progressive disciplinary process.
- Report your concerns to your superior.
- Conduct a formal incident review or investigation.
- Terminate the employee.
- Notify authorities.
- Notify parents or guardians.

However you respond, take one more action as well: get back to the person who reported the incident. You don't have to give details regarding personnel or confidential matters, but you can reassure this person that his or her concern has been addressed. Staff will have more confidence about reporting once they know that you will take the necessary steps to solve the problem.

### 5. Develop organizational response:

Finally, once the dust has settled, consider whether the report uncovers a larger problem. For example, did you learn that an important policy was frequently violated? Or that many employees knew of the concern but didn't know what to do about it? Or whether your employees did not have the information they needed to adequately perform their jobs. Analyzing a single incident in this way will reveal whether you have a problem with one person or a systemic problem that requires a change to your policies, your response systems, or training.

***Only you, as administrators, have the authority to make system-wide changes such as these that will keep all of your clients safe.***

Email us today at [info1@praesidiuminc.com](mailto:info1@praesidiuminc.com) for a complete guide or consultation.

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## In the Spotlight

### On-site Training:

This [on-site training](#) will focus on your specific industry. In it, you will learn how to know when you have gathered enough information and how to determine the proper level of response. The training includes interactive exercises based on real cases.

### Confidential Line:

Confidential Phone Line for reports of suspicions or incidents. Staff are often more willing to report if they can do so without identifying themselves. Contact us for a [free three-month subscription](#) to this service.

Visit us at [PraesidiumInc.com](http://PraesidiumInc.com) or call 817.801.7773 for additional information.

## On the Road

### Conferences and Speaking Engagements for 2009:

- WWA N. American Spring Symposium | February 10–13 | Grapevine, TX
- 2009 Texas School Safety Expo | February 11-12 | Arlington, TX
- 4th Annual National Safe Environment Leadership | March 1-5 | Chicago, IL
- The Salvation Army National Social Services | March 14-18 | Chicago, IL
- NAYDO Conference and Exhibitors | April 22-25 | Dallas, TX

[Schedule a private meeting or consultation today!](#)

## In the News

- [“Sexting” Teens Can Go Too Far:](#) Sending Provocative Images Over Cell Phones Is All the Rage, but It Can Go All Wrong.
- [Bill to Strengthen Sex-consent Law Gets Boost:](#) Teachers in New York who engage in consensual sexual relationships with students 17 and older are not, in the law's eyes, committing a crime.
- [Sexual Abuse in Children: Can you Recognize the Symptoms?:](#) An estimated 90,000 cases of child sexual abuse were substantiated in the U.S.

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