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School's In – Keep Danger Out!

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Parents, please take the time to find out how your child's school will protect them while they are in their care. All too often we hear in the news about a child sexual abuse scandal, a child who was left on a bus or a child who was lost as they simply walked out of the school due to a lack of supervision. You can't take for granted that all schools have adequate policies in place. Ask about them, ask for copies of them, and go over them, when appropriate, with your child.

Here are a few policies that The [New York Society](#) for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children recommends that parents find out about:

- **Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Policies and Procedures:** The school should have several measures in place to protect your child. There should be a designated child abuse liaison (or some similar title) who is responsible for arranging training staff on [identification and reporting](#) procedures, scheduling personal safety training for the children and coordinating reports of alleged abuse and neglect when they need to be reported. There should be **TWO** different types of protocols, one that is followed if the parent/guardian is the alleged perpetrator of the abuse or neglect and one that is followed if a teacher, administrator or other school personnel are suspected of abuse. Find out when the school held the last training for all staff on reporting child abuse or neglect.
- **Background Checks on School Personnel:** Find out how school personnel are cleared before they are allowed to work with your child. Ask about how they screen for past incidents of child abuse, drug screening procedures and criminal background checks. It's also helpful to know the types of licenses and certifications that are held by the staff. Similarly, you also want to make sure that all volunteers and contracted services personnel, such as the bus driver, have gone through background checks too.
- **Bullying Prevention Policy. Be informed.** Learn about your school's policy towards bullying. New York State has the ["Dignity for All Students Act"](#) (2012) that protects children from harm on school property or at a school function. Find out who you can speak to if your child is bullied. It's also helpful to write down the details regarding the incident(s), as this record can be helpful to school administrators or the

police. If it's cyber-bullying, keep copies of all messages or postings. Commit to making bullying stop. Work closely with your school administrators, other parents and if needed, local law enforcement if the bullying persists or escalates. Get help for your child to deal with the stresses of bullying. Speak with a school counselor to get support for your child. The [National Crime Prevention Council](#) offers some additional parent tips.

- **Emergency Notification System:** Emergencies usually come without much warning. Between fires, natural disasters and tragic school shootings, it's critical for a parent to know how their child will be protected if these situations occur while they are on the school grounds. Ask about the security coverage at the school. Who takes charge during an emergency? Have all school personnel received training? Find out how you will be alerted if there is an emergency at the school or an emergency with your child. It's also a good to ask about the frequency of practicing fire drills and other safety drills. The [National Education Association](#) has a school crisis guide with helpful planning strategies.

- **Medical Emergency/First Aid:** Find out what happens if your child is injured or has a medical emergency such as an asthma attack, concussion, or allergic reaction while at school. Is there a school nurse or another medical provider onsite? Who in the school is trained in CPR? How are medications that a child needs to take during the school day monitored? If 911 needs to be called, will the child be accompanied to the hospital?

- **Security:** Inquire as to the overall security measures in place, such as cameras, security guards and how visitors are screened. Find out what measures are in place to prohibit intruders from gaining access to your child. I'd also recommend asking about how weapons are handled if they are discovered in the course of the school day. The National [School Safety](#) and Security Services suggests 10 things that parents can do to assess their child's safety at school.

- **Transportation:** Make sure that you understand the school's plan for transportation. Getting your precious child back and forth to school each day requires several attentive adults to make sure that they get safely from the bus to the school and then back again. Learn the route that your child will travel and information on the bus driver. Visit the bus stop with your child and make sure they know which bus to take to get to school and find out how they find the bus when they leave the school. If your child is walking "head up, phone down" is the way to go. The [National Safety Council](#) has good tips at this link.

Knowledge is power, and you'll rest easier if you find out about these topics before the school year starts. If the school has a website, visit it, some of this information may be online. For more information about rules and policies, go to your local Board of Education website. Here is the [link](#) for NYC's Board of Education.

For more information on keeping your child safe, visit www.nyspcc.org