

Pinellas County License Board for Children's Centers & Family Day Care Homes

Our mission is to protect and promote the health, safety, and mental development of children cared for in children's centers and family child care homes in Pinellas County

Patsy Buker, Executive Director
Elise Minkoff, Chairman



Greetings!

Message from Patsy Buker, Executive Director

I am happy to announce that I am celebrating my first six months with the Child Care Licensing Program (CCLP) of the Pinellas County Health Department! It has been a true pleasure to get to know the wonderful staff here at the Health Department and I have very much enjoyed meeting many of the child care providers. Truth be told, it has been an interesting experience to learn the various rules and regulations, but it is coming along nicely with time and exposure. The good news is that I am surrounded by a tremendous and talented staff, so I am well supported as I learn. I can appreciate the great deal of thoughtful consideration that has gone into developing the regulations over the years, and I am sure that they have saved lives and increased quality of child care.

My plan has been and continues to be to devote as much time as possible to being in the field with our Licensing Specialists, attending provider meetings, and meeting with individual providers. I have been listening carefully and trying to gather a well rounded view of the history of PCLB. No organization exists in a vacuum, so it is important for me to understand the various perspectives and perceptions of child care licensing and providers in Pinellas.

From what I have seen so far, the PCLB has a rich history dating back to the 1950's. It appears that it has been through more significant changes over the last four years than in the entire rest of its history, having downsized considerably and moving from JWB to the Health Department. There also has been three different Executive Directors during that short time, compared with only having four different leaders over the six prior decades! We all know that change can be stressful, and from what I understand this has not only been stressful to the organization and staff, but to the provider community, as well. We are consciously attempting to alleviate the stress through applying thoughtful and strategic planning and through fair and consistent enforcement of the licensing rules.

We plan to send out information to child care providers periodically, and we hope to develop an accurate list of Email addresses so that we can also communicate electronically with those who prefer that method. We will continue to let you know about new developments like the availability of fingerprinting at our Center Bay office, and we will let you know about trends that we are seeing in the field. Our goal is to help each child care provider to be successful and be in compliance with regulations. A good inspection report is a goal that we share with each of you!

New Location for Fingerprinting!

PCLB is pleased to announce that the Pinellas County Health Department is now offering fingerprinting services for child care providers for background screening through **Live Scan** at the Center Bay Offices. The cost to providers is **\$27.25**, and **appointments** can be made for **Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.**

To schedule an appointment at Center Bay, **4175 East Bay Drive, Suite 350, in Clearwater**, please feel free to contact us at: **(727) 507- 4857 ext. 1113.**

Payment is made by check or money order payable to the Pinellas County Health Department in the amount of \$27.25 and is accepted at the time of the screening. Credit cards and cash are also accepted.

Helpful Hints and Reminders

Safe Storage of Toxic and Hazardous Materials

All children's centers that serve preschool aged children must store toxic and hazardous materials in a locked area. School age centers must keep them inaccessible to children, unless they have Day Nursery (preschool aged) children in care, and then they must also lock toxic and hazardous materials. **Locks can be keyed locks, slide locks, hook and eyes, or manufacturer's "child-proof" locks.** They must be engaged. If a key lock is not engaged, that means that the area is no longer secure. Please make sure that "child proof" locks are correctly installed, so that the cabinet/closet is secure, and cannot be opened by a child.

Staff must read labels. **Items labeled "Keep out of reach of children" must be locked.** They should also look around their classrooms to see what other items could be dangerous in a child's hands, i.e. push pins, very sharp scissors, etc. A walk through of the entire center by the staff and the director during a staff meeting may be an excellent way to identify all potentially dangerous items that need to be locked or inaccessible during the time that children are in care. You may want to give someone the responsibility of checking several times during the day to make sure that locks are locked!

Standing Water on Playgrounds

As rainy season approaches, please keep in mind that before children go outside onto the outdoor play space, someone needs to ensure that there is no standing water in equipment. Besides being a potential drowning risk, standing water is a breeding ground for mosquitoes that not only are annoying but have the risk of transmitting diseases. Water also could make equipment slippery and unsafe. If it rains during the day, the same procedures should be in place, so that when the weather clears and children are able to go outside, there is no standing water.

Hand Washing

Staff must wash their hands after changing each diaper, after assisting a child with using the restroom, after attending to their own or a child's personal hygiene, and when coming in from outside. They should also wash their hands before serving or touching food. Children must wash their hands after being diapered, using the rest room and coming in from outside. Best practice would also include having children wash hands before and after eating. Hand washing is one of the most effective means of stopping the spread of germs, and can curtail the spread of disease that can be quite debilitating to a child. Hand washing can be made fun for children by using a song, a chant, or having a chart of pictures that they can use to follow the process.

Transitions

In Pinellas County we have had several serious situations that have arisen because staff did not make sure that their attendance was accurate when they transitioned their class from one place to another. Sometimes a group of children is travelling a distance from their classroom to the playground, or the chapel, and this is when a child is going to become separated from the group. Staff should be counting and documenting how many children they have when they leave a location, and then document that they have the same children when they arrive at their destination. They will then know immediately if they have left someone behind. Many Class 1 fines could have been avoided if staff ensured the accuracy of their attendance at transition.

Mandatory Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect

All personnel who work at a children's center or school age center are required to sign an Acknowledgement Form each year verifying that they understand that they are mandated reporters. They must report any suspicion of abuse, neglect, or abandonment to the DCF Abuse Hotline **1(800) 96-ABUSE**. Some examples might be a lack of supervision (physical neglect), bruising (physical abuse), or observing inappropriate discipline being used (physical or mental abuse). **Reports must be made IMMEDIATELY, at a minimum, on the day that it is observed.** Remember, the primary reason to report abuse or neglect is to protect children.

Employees are encouraged to follow any internal procedures set forth by their employer, in terms of notifying management, etc. However, they need to understand that even a direct order from a supervisor will not relieve them of their legal mandate to report suspicions, and they should not assume that someone else will make the call for them nor should they wait to see if it happens again before calling in the report. Employees need to understand that once they have a suspicion and do not report it, that they may have left a child in danger, that they have personally committed a misdemeanor, and that a serious violation has occurred that can result in severe monetary penalties to the children's center. The identity of the reporter is kept confidential by law. Directors and owners need to encourage staff to make legitimate reports and support them. PCLB staff members will be glad to provide advice if you have a question regarding reporting. PCLB should also be notified as soon as the call to the hotline is made.

Closing Thoughts...

The Board of Directors of the Pinellas County License Board and the staff at the Child Care Licensing Program continue to support the mission of protecting and promoting the health, safety, and mental development of children cared for in children's centers and family child care homes in Pinellas. The only way to successfully carry out this mission is through an active and supportive relationship with child care providers. We are placing a renewed emphasis on providing technical assistance to providers and we are reviewing regulations in an effort to ensure relevance and clarity.

Our goals for 2011 include:

- Conducting a thoughtful review of Pinellas regulations and proposing changes as appropriate, in order to ensure quality care for children
- Strengthening relationships with providers and community partners with a goal of increasing trust and mutual respect
- Increasing opportunities for direct and open communications with providers
- Providing technical assistance for individual provider's situations
- Providing community training on subjects of interest to child care providers and potential providers

We welcome input and suggestions from individual child care providers, provider associations, and our community partners, and we look forward to working together on behalf of children.