

FSL FAQs

POPARD Family - School Liaison Newsletter



FAQ: WHAT DOES IT MEAN WHEN MY CHILD HAS A SAFETY PLAN AT SCHOOL?

The first thing is: take a deep breath and slowly let it out. A Safety Plan is not a teaching plan or a way of excluding or punishing your child. It is, instead, a "WorkSafeBC" document that your child's school staff believe is needed to safeguard the wellbeing of staff who support your child.

The School Act allows a child of school age who is resident in British Columbia to attend a school anywhere in the province – if:

... the board providing the educational program determines that space and facilities are available for the person at the school in which the educational program is made available [Section 2, 2 (c)]

A Safety Plan can enhance the capacity of a school to support a student and avoid excluding a student from a school if their environment can be re-engineered to provide a safe context for their instruction.

What is a Safety Plan?

A Safety Plan is based on section 115 of the *Workers' Compensation Act* which requires employers to inform and protect their employees from any harm that might arise in the workplace.

It is no more – or less – than a written procedure that describes how staff should conduct risky or complex tasks (*Creating and Managing a Healthy and Safe Workplace*, below, p. 31). And it is important to acknowledge that when it works as intended, it also protects your child from effects of actions on their part that might affect their future well-being.

Why does my child need a Safety Plan?

If you did not request a Safety Plan, you might wonder why your child deserves such attention. If you did request a plan, you might wonder why it took school staff so long to get to it.

In either case, we acknowledge that Safety Plans are not written for most students. Bringing them about requires resources of time and, often, expertise. Writing a Safety Plan is a thoughtful way to respond to complex and fraught events or conditions or behaviours.

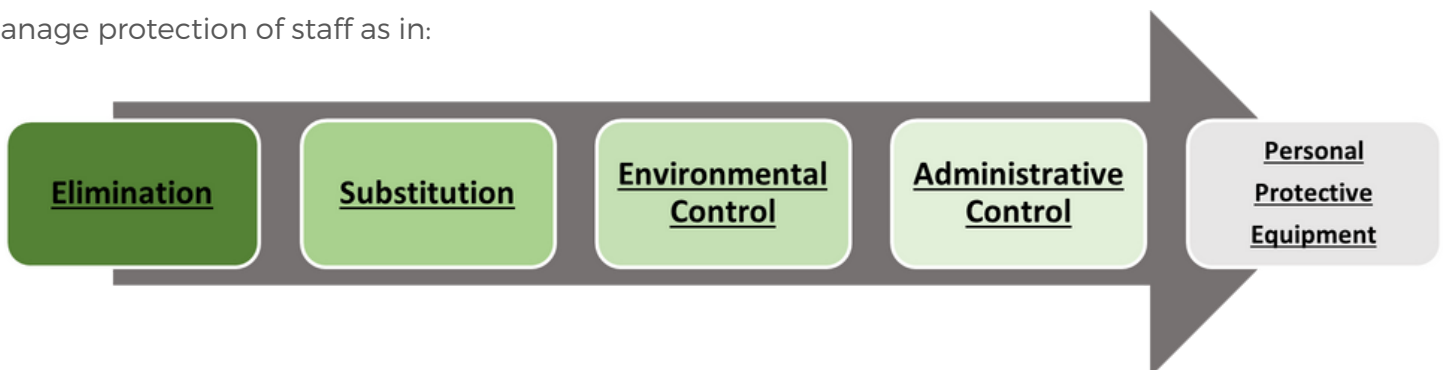
The Safety Plan might address a physical need that requires the use of specific procedures by school staff to avoid injuring themselves or anyone else. Or an emotional or mental or social condition or circumstance might require staff to use specific behaviours or language to prevent or de-escalate situations in which they, your child, or others might be at risk of harm.

Contents of a Safety Plan

The contents of a Safety Plan commonly include:

- a description of settings, conditions, or behaviours that, in the opinion of school staff, might place the wellbeing of school staff (and the consequent mental or physical wellbeing of your child) in jeopardy
- means of preventing these conditions or behaviours from occurring before the wellbeing of anyone is in jeopardy
- procedures to de-escalate difficulties or ease the effects of these conditions when they occur, if prevention has not been effective
- assigning specific persons to implement preventive or remedial interventions

Safety Plans involve identifying the prospect of harm and the gravity of potential harm. If the prospect of harm and the gravity of potential cross a threshold of risk to staff, employers must consider how to manage protection of staff as in:



The above diagram lists intervention choices that employers might make to ensure staff safety (and in the course of this, protect your child). Interventions include **elimination of a risk** or **substitution of an alternate condition or performance**. In a school, this might mean deleting or replacing: a location, a curriculum, a procedure or an expectation. These actions are often powerful and immediately successful.

Environmental and **administrative controls** often take time to reduce risk but may be worthwhile overall. Common examples include:

- altering the time when an activity takes place,
- altering the complexity of an activity,
- altering the way in which an activity is presented,
- altering the duration of an activity,
- altering the level of performance expected for the activity, or
- teaching a skill that is required to perform a complex activity.

The least effective intervention, generally, to protect staff is **personal protective equipment**. This intervention might also create new issues.

When you see your child's safety plan, the language used in the plan might seem "official" or overwhelming, especially if your child is in elementary grades. It is helpful to take another breath and to understand the purpose of the plan. The purpose is protection -- protection of those who are asked to help your child and protection of your child and others.

Writing a plan and carrying it out should involve support by staff who possess skills to address the issues identified in the plan. When Safety Plans are written for students with special needs, staff who are part of that student's Individual Education Plan should be involved in writing the Safety Plan, as it might be best considered as a supplement to the student's IEP (which should be reviewed at least every year).

Whether or not your child is a student with special needs, when you meet with school staff to review a Safety Plan, it would be practical to ask if school staff with specialist training, such as a school counsellor, or school district staff, such as a psychologist, speech-language pathologist, or a behaviour interventionist, will attend. Depending upon the content of the plan, their expertise or perspective can assist in fine-tuning the plan to ensure that it is comprehensive. If they cannot be present, you might request a follow-up meeting with them.

If you disagree with the need for a Safety Plan or with some of the content in the plan, you can appeal to the principal of your child's school or to senior staff in the school district; routes to appeal are outlined in POPARD FAQs: [What do I do if I do not agree with the goals on the IEP?](#) and [Why is my child not allowed to be in school full-time?](#)

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR WOULD LIKE FURTHER INFORMATION
CONTACT POPARD'S FAMILY-SCHOOL LIAISON**

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