

# Club Success With The Situational Prevention Approach

## BGCA Safer Childhoods Network Symposium

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**Situational Prevention Approach (SPA): Four Step Safety Self-Assessment Process** The goal of the Situational Prevention Approach (SPA) process is to identify as many of the risks to youth that exist in a youth serving organization (YSO) setting at a given time, create a prevention or a risk-reduction solution for each risk drawing from organizational strengths and protective factors, prioritize the order of risks to be addressed, and then create brief implementation plans that guide taking effective action to resolve these risks. The four steps in the SPA process include:

**STEP 1 - Brainstorming Safety Risks.** This step involves brainstorming safety risks that exist in and are linked to a specific YSO setting. The goal here is to get multiple perspectives that foster an identification of all existing risks at that moment in time. The clearest results are achieved when risks are brainstormed for each YSO site separately. Risks are brainstormed in seven key areas: high risk locations; characteristics of high risk youth; facilitators; organization and community policies; lifestyle and routine activities; the larger community environment; and health, safety, and accident prevention (see definitions below). Input is obtained from three groups as part of one time brainstorming sessions, which include 6-8 participants: (1) youth's parents; (2) older youth participants (14-17 years old); and (3) a YSO workgroup (made up of staff, volunteers, administrators, & board members). The YSO workgroup meets for 2 hours and the other two groups meet for 90 minutes. The final list of risks in each area is reviewed by non-workgroup YSO staff and volunteers to ensure that risks were not missed before going on to step two in this process.

**STEP 2 – Developing Solutions For Each Identified Safety Risk.** A practical solution is developed to address each identified risk. Where possible, prevention strategies are developed as solutions (e.g., limiting access to the front door that takes visitors past the receptionist and prevents entry by unknown visitors). For risks that can't be prevented a risk reduction strategy is developed to maximize safety (e.g., preventing visitors to an evening sports program may not make sense, but risks can be minimized by having all visitors sign in and wear a visitor badge). The workgroup draws from YSO strengths and protective factors in developing solutions. Costs are discussed for each solution to ensure that it is practical. The YSO workgroup is responsible for this step and meets twice (2 hours per meeting) to create a solution for each of the identified risks.

**STEP 3- Prioritization Of Safety Risks To Address & Logistical Considerations.** The third step focuses on prioritizing identified risks for solution implementation. This step is typically completed by the YSO setting leadership with consultation from higher level administrators since resources may be needed to implement particular safety solutions. Considerations for prioritization include how concerned the leadership is about the risk as well as costs and staffing issues associated with solutions. Leadership is asked to sort risks into two categories: (1) those "Less Challenging" to address (e.g., keeping non-essential doors locked); and (2) those "More Challenging" to resolve (e.g., creating a system for "checking-in" visitors to watch evening basketball). Once sorted, leadership prioritizes each of the two lists of risks to be addressed.

**STEP 4 – Developing Solution Implementation Plans & Taking Action.** This final step involves creating a simple solution implementation plan and taking action to resolve each of the identified risks in priority order. YSO settings are asked to work on resolving **five** risks at a time (i.e., three from their "Less Challenging" to solve list and two from the "More Challenging" list). A simple implementation plan is developed for each of the top five risks and the YSO site director guides the process of taking action to resolve each of these risks. Every time one of these risks is "fixed," a brief implementation plan is created for the next highest prioritized risk to be addressed and action is taken on this new item. If the risk resolved was from the "Less Challenging" list, the next highest priority risk on that priority list is selected to address next. If the resolved risk was from the "More Challenging" list, it is replaced by the next highest priority risk from that list. Consideration is also given to whether existing YSO policies need to be adjusted to allow for these new solutions. At this point, a time is schedule to repeat the SPA process (at least once a year). The SPA is completed on a regular basis to ensure that new risks are identified and addressed.

## **Situational Prevention Approach: Brainstorm Areas & Definitions**

**1 - High Risk Locations** refer to specific rooms, hallways or spaces within or around an SPA setting. These locations may increase the chances of a safety incident due to a variety of reasons including a place's isolated nature (e.g., a remote baseball diamond), difficulty providing adequate supervision for this location (e.g., bathrooms, stairs, locker rooms) or even a place where the large number of other people present make supervision very difficult (e.g., a community swimming pool). High Risk Locations include any part of the YSO building or grounds as well as any setting that participants travel to as part of their YSO involvement (e.g., field trips).

**2 - Characteristics Of At-Risk Youth** represent characteristics of youth and their families that may increase their safety risk. This category includes characteristics of children and teens as well as characteristics of their parents or guardians that may put them at risk. Youth related risks in this category could include being young, withdrawn, frequently engaging in attention seeking behavior, and having developmental delays. Characteristics of youth's parents that may increase risk include parents who are: not around to provide supervision, neglectful, working multiple jobs; and have substance abuse difficulties.

**3 - Facilitators** may be thought of as the factors that allow or make it easier for safety incidents to occur. Facilitators often reduce the quality of supervision provided by staff and volunteers, negatively impact the amount and quality of direct youth supervision, allow safety rules to be avoided, create "one-to-one" situations between staff and youth, make staff and volunteer roles less clear, and allow for the manipulation of youth and/or other staff. It is important to note that facilitators can develop "accidentally" (e.g., a new volunteer who fills in for sick staff before a background check can be completed) or in a more purposeful way (e.g., a volunteer who actively works to create situations where he or she is alone with children). Examples include: staff who are poorly screened in their job interview; a low staff to youth ratio; more senior staff or staff who have worked at the site for many years and don't always follow the rules; teens who actively seek an isolated part of the building to "make out;" parents afraid to confront staff when they have concerns; and missing safety policies (e.g., field trips) .

**4 - Organization & Community Policies** reflect the organizational climate and policies as well as local city, town, and community policies. For YSOs this typically focuses on missing policies, outdated policies, and/or policies that are not adequately communicated to staff and volunteers (e.g., delays in orientation). An example might include staff who regularly provide 1:1 assistance for young or developmentally delayed members in the YSO's bathroom. For community policies, the focus is on how youth are put at risk by the policies that the YSO encounters while in community settings. For example, a swim outing at a community center during "general swim" time or a trip to a local city park with high hedges that makes supervision difficult could put youth at-risk.

**5 - Lifestyle and Routine Activities** reflect BOTH risks related to the day-to-day activities of youth and their families as well as the behaviors of YSO staff and volunteers. For youth, their parents' work schedules may require them to wait at the YSO site by themselves an hour before it opens for camp or they may walk through a dangerous neighborhood each day on their way to the YSO. For staff or volunteers, routine activities that present a risk may include transporting youth in a van or locker room supervision at the local swim center.

**6 - The Larger Community Environment** represents the risks that youth face in neighborhoods and communities that surround the YSO. This includes any properties and areas next to the YSO, but not owned and managed by the YSO. The Larger Physical Environment includes all of the neighborhoods that youth travel through and "hang out" in on their way to the YSO. These risks can include dangerous places (e.g., abandoned buildings), dangerous people (e.g., gang members), and dangerous situations (e.g., being "hit on" by older teens). Other examples could include traveling through alleys or woods youth take as short cuts, a city playground next to the YSO with high bushes, a poorly lighted bus or train stop, and busy streets to cross.

**7 - Health, Accident Prevention, & Physical Safety Concerns** represent all non-child sexual abuse related risks. This includes a broad range of concerns that may be associated with maintaining children's health (e.g., exposure to mold in a wet facility wall), accident prevention (e.g., preventing slips and falls, injury during sports), and ensuring physical safety (e.g., preventing injury due to fights or bullying).

## Risk Examples: The Seven Situational Prevention Brainstorming Areas

<p><b>HIGH RISK LOCATIONS</b>                  Stairwells                  Storage room                  Sports equipment room                  Baseball dugouts                  Unlit facility exterior areas</p>	<p>Area behind the vending machines                  Back seats of vans                  Woods around the building                  Unused, unlocked rooms at the facility                  The gym, when empty                  Bathrooms</p>
<p><b>CHARACTERISTICS OF AT-RISK YOUTH</b>                  Developmental/intellectual disabilities                  Emotionally “needy” youth                  Low self-esteem                  Have parents who abuse drugs/alcohol</p>	<p>Come from an abusive or unstable household                  Have parents who are neglectful                  Are influenced by older youth who are bad role models                  Are supervised by older sibling who is too young for this role</p>
<p><b>FACILITATORS</b>                  Low staff-to-youth ratio                  Too few really qualified staff supervising youth                  Sports fields open to the community with unknown spectators                  Wet YSO floors</p>	<p>New staff &amp; volunteers who have not been oriented                  Incomplete information about youth and their special needs                  Incomplete contact information for family members                  Great deal of 1:1 time between staff and members                  Too much running in the YSO</p>
<p><b>LIFESTYLE AND ROUTINE ACTIVITIES</b>  <u>Children &amp; Families</u>                  Children who walk to and from the YSO                  Frequent communication issues between parents and staff                  Communication problems with parents regarding pickups                  Parents who work multiple jobs and leave youth unsupervised                  Caregivers who drop off members early</p>	<p>Single parent households without enough supervision                  Younger YSO participants “dating” older participants</p> <p><u>Staff, &amp; Volunteers</u>                  Staff/Volunteers who "call off" work sick to get a day off                  Staff/Volunteers on their cell when supervising youth                  Staff/Volunteers who transport youth</p>
<p><b>LARGER COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT</b>                  Lack of traffic lights or stop signs on corners near the facility                  Abandoned homes played in on the way to or from the YSO                  The industrial/commercial areas around the YSO                  Dark bus and train stops</p>	<p>The dangerous neighborhood children walk through                  Gang members who threaten youth                  Drug dealers/addicts/homeless people in the neighborhood                  Older teens and men who "hit on" teens walking home</p>
<p><b>YSO AND COMMUNITY POLICIES</b>  <u>YSO Policies</u>                  Poor enforcement of policies to deal with late staff/volunteers                  No policy against younger children walking home alone                  Lack of policies around “negative” talk to youth                  Poor enforcement of policies to stop staff's rough housing and aggressive play with youth                  Using volunteers under the age of 18 who cannot be given a background check                  Lack of policies regarding social relationships with members' siblings and family members</p>	<p><u>Community</u>                  Community facilities that allow children and adults to “mix”                  Swim held at community pools during general or adult swim hours (with not enough supervision)                  Community fields don't trim bushes and trees, which makes it hard to supervise youth                  Limited police response to the area homeless people and gangs</p>
<p><b>HEALTH, ACCIDENT PREVENTION, &amp; PHYSICAL SAFETY CONCERNS</b>                  Soda and candy in YSO machines means a lack of healthy snack choices                  Staff and volunteers being too rough with youth                  Bullying behavior tolerated or not identified                  Facility kitchen not kept clean enough</p>	<p>Youth bringing gang conflicts into the club                  Poorly supervised weight room                  Poorly maintained fields or gym                  Broken or worn sports equipment                  Too much sexualized behavior between teen members                  A lack of attention to food brought in by staff and youth                  Mold in the club walls from roof leaks</p>

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