



YMCA of Sydney

4th November 2011

Principals
YMCA Children's Services
Via email

Dear Principal,

RE: Parent Information – Commonly questions asked of the YMCA by our Communities

As previously mentioned, we will continue to communicate with our community throughout this challenging time to ensure we provide as much information to you as possible, whilst not jeopardizing the court proceedings.

Separate to the matter before the court, we understand that there are consistent questions being asked of the YMCA by our community specifically relating to the policies and procedures of our Outside School Hours Care Program.

In response, we have provided the attached information containing YMCA responses to the questions raised. This information will be distributed to Parents and Families of the Sutherland Shire Region's YMCA Children's Services community today.

At this stage, we must continue to direct concerned parents and carers to the Child Protection Helpline (132 111).

With the proceedings in front of the court we are legally restricted in what we can communicate at this time. We assure you that the YMCA is continuing to cooperate fully with the Kogarah Joint Investigation Response Team (JIRT).

We restate our commitment to providing you with additional information as it becomes available. We hope our communication meets your expectations.

Yours sincerely

Liam Whitley
General Manager
Children's Services

Parent Information

Commonly Asked Questions of the YMCA

1. With the requirement that there has to be two staff always with children, what happens when there is only one staff member as the driver of the bus when it is picking up children? Are there other times when one staff member is left alone with a child?

This bus run practice is one that is used throughout the industry and one that has been approved through many Quality Assurance compliance visits across the YMCA and other service providers.

In centres, we would not have a situation where a staff member is left behind with only one child. As per the industry standard, we would ensure that there is a group of children and we have contingency plans in place if there are any issues that occur during this bus run time that allow for assistance to be provided within a reasonable time frame.

When it comes to children travelling on the bus, we try to ensure that there is more than one child on the bus at all times. Where this can't be ensured, we have asked for parents signed permission for this bus run to occur. We have a clear outline as to how a bus run would occur if there was only one child being taken to school including a seating plan for the bus, clear time limits and a contingency plan if something were to go wrong i.e. traffic issues or the bus breaking down.

2. There is to be a strong desire to have some normality with staffing. Parents are concerned that they will not know who will be there on any day, post the arrest. Is there a more settled arrangement now?

During these challenging times, we have had to do a number of staff reshuffles to create the strongest staffing teams possible in a time not only affected by the current allegations but also by the need for a number of our staff to be away from work due to university commitments.

We are doing everything possible to keep familiar staff with the children and ensure an environment of consistency.

3. Is there a roster system so that parents know who is scheduled to be working at what venue on a particular day?

We will certainly provide a week to week roster for families that will be displayed within centres. The roster will be posted in the centres at the end of the week detailing the next week's rosters. The only changes that would take place then would be if someone called in sick on the day.

4. There is a strong need for reassurance that the Y's child protection processes are very strong and are being reviewed in the light of what has taken place.

As with any major incident, a review of all current policies, procedures and operations will be reviewed and external support sought where necessary. Our organisational processes currently meet legislation and are reviewed on a 12 month basis. If industry processes or legislation changes within the 12 months then an immediate review is done. Once policy and procedure is changed, staff are trained on the variations to policy.



YMCA of Sydney

From the moment of recruitment, all YMCA staff must go through a thorough reference check along with a Working with Children Check which is completed by the Commission for Children and Young People. Once cleared all staff undertake an internal YMCA Induction process where policies must be read. This induction is a supervised process where key staff members are involved.

All staff members participate in a range of internal and external training throughout the year. Our training programs are delivered by quality, reputable training organisations such as Children's Services Central, Network of Community Activities (OSHC Peak Body in NSW), Commission for Children and Young People, Seamann and Slatter and the Farran Street Group.

In addition, we have clear procedures of Performance Management if staff have not followed procedure and this process is facilitated by the staff members direct Manager and a Senior Manager.

All staff participate in an internal Performance Development Review where further skill development is documented. Throughout the term all centres are visited by the direct Children's Services Coordinator and their Children's Services Manager. It is common that the Children's Services Program Manager and the Children's Services General Manager will also visit the centre, each completing an audit on the overall centre including the quality of staffing.

Clear communication protocols are in place so that staff are all familiar with their reporting requirements.

7. What are the arrangements for children going to the toilet that might need help?

The majority of children that are in our care don't require help with toileting.

Occasionally we have a very young child who may have toileting accidents. In this situation all staff members within the centre would be informed so that they are clear that a staff member would be offering direct assistance to a child. This would be recorded in the centre diary so that parents would be informed of what took place. If the child had an older sibling they would be asked to accompany the child and the staff member and be present while assistance is given.

Where the situation arises with a child requiring additional assistance, the toileting process for the individual child would have been discussed during the enrolment process. Often there is a communication book process in place for a child with an additional need and daily toileting practices would be noted down for parents.

8. Some parents have commented on the fact that children were sometimes sitting on the lap of a carer, watching a movie or playing a game, when they come to pick them up. Is that a standard practice?

We do find that at times our younger children want to sit on the laps of staff particularly after a long day at school. Often it is the children who are in care from early in the morning until late in the afternoon and also use Vacation Care. These children develop close bonds with staff members and may at times want to sit on a lap or get a hug as staff become an extension of the adults in their life who really care about them.

We have reiterated to our staff that they are to request the children to sit next to the staff member rather than on their lap. Often children need this process repeated on a number of occasions.



YMCA of Sydney

This is the same process that we use when children continue to hug our staff. It really is about the comfort level for the child. Staff often will take a gentle approach with curbing this behaviour as the children are often tired and in need of comfort and staff don't want to be seen as not caring for the individual child's needs.

Our policy clearly outlines acceptable behaviour in regards to physical contact with children and provides a more acceptable approach.

9. A couple of parents mentioned that there was someone they had not seen before at a centre shortly after the first communication from the YMCA to parents. This person seemed to be around just observing and parents want to know who that person might be and what their role was.

Our Children Services Manager for the Southern Region is Irene Minos. Irene was placed at the centre not only to provide further support to the staff but to help with any parent inquiries during recent weeks. This was at the time the YMCA distributed our parent communication letters and we were receiving a number of questions from parents.

To ensure our staff could focus on the children in their care, Irene was there to talk with parents rather than having staff taken away from children to answer questions. Irene has a great deal of experience in Children's Services and has undergone all of the appropriate recruitment processes and Working with Children Checks. We understand that this may have caused some unnecessary alarm and will ensure we communicate who support staff are in the future.