



EXEMPTION NEWS YOU CAN USE

JANUARY 2024 WINTER EDITION



HIGHLIGHTS

Going above and beyond: Ensuring a positive experience for parents and children

Transportation Safety

January is Mental Wellness Month

Mental Wellness is important

**Frequently asked questions (FAQ) for CAPS Health and Safety Monitoring visits -
Categories 1 & 7**

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Going Above and Beyond: Ensuring a Positive Experience for Parents and Children



Customer service is an essential aspect of any industry, and childcare is no exception. When it comes to a parent entrusting the care of their children to someone else, parents expect nothing but the best. Therefore, providing stellar customer service in childcare is crucial for building trust and maintaining a positive reputation. First and foremost, effective communication is key in delivering excellent customer service. Childcare providers must establish open lines of communication with parents, ensuring that they are well-informed about their child's daily activities, progress, and any concerns that may arise. Regular updates, whether through face-to-face conversations, phone calls, emails, or daily notes help parents feel involved and reassured about their child's wellbeing. As an exempt provider, you may not be aware of recent rule changes that have taken place for licensed Childcare Learning Centers.

A recently adopted rule requires that licensed providers immediately notify parents when their child has been involved in an incident that puts their health and or safety at risk. This new rule not only serves to ensure the health and safety of the child but also serves as an example of customer service. By informing the parent of an incident involving their child, the parent can make an educated decision of possible next steps. Additionally, timely communication and a fully advised parent is less likely to find fault with the facility. Newly adopted licensed Childcare Learning Center rules can be found at <http://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/CCLCRulesandRegulations.pdf>. Another important aspect of customer service in childcare is creating a warm and welcoming environment. Keep in mind cultural and language inclusivity. Parents should feel comfortable and confident when dropping off their children, knowing that they are leaving them in a safe and nurturing space. Staff should greet parents and children with a friendly smile, offer assistance when needed, and maintain a clean and organized facility. A positive atmosphere goes a long way in building trust and cultivating family engagement with the program. Make certain a designated individual always oversees the program and can help parents when needed. Remember, it's typically the human interactions that a family and child will often remember. Make them exude positivity! Flexibility is also crucial in providing excellent customer service in childcare. Parents often have busy schedules and unexpected events that may require adjustments to their child's care arrangements. Flexibility demonstrates a willingness to go above and beyond. This in turn often creates program loyalty. Loyalty goes hand in hand with building long-term relationships with families. These relationships can ultimately lead to positive word of mouth referrals.

Furthermore, addressing and resolving concerns promptly is essential in maintaining customer satisfaction. Childcare providers should have a clear process in place for handling complaints or issues that may arise. By actively listening to parents' concerns and taking appropriate action, childcare providers can show their dedication providing quality care and ensuring the well-being of the children in their care. An ideal way to convey policies, procedures, and overall center expectations, is to have a written parent handbook that is provided to parents upon their child's enrollment. In conclusion, customer service plays a dynamic role in the childcare industry. By focusing on effective communication, creating a welcoming environment, offering flexibility, and addressing concerns promptly, childcare providers can deliver outstanding customer service. Building trust and maintaining positive relationships with parents is not only beneficial for the childcare center's reputation but also for the overall well-being and development of the children in their care.

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY



As outdoor temperatures drop, do not let your guard drop. If your program transports children, child transportation safety should always be an important part of your program's child safety guidelines. License exempt programs are not regulated for transportation safety like licensed childcare providers unless the program receives subsidy. However, license exempt providers have an obligation to keep children safe while in their care. License exempt programs are encouraged to continue the Look Again campaign throughout the year.

Look Again refers to multiple checks of a vehicle by different staff members to ensure no child is left behind on a transportation vehicle. It is important through all seasons to keep our youngest citizens safe.

While transporting children, keep these simple things in mind:

1. Obtain permission forms.
 - a. Have the document signed and dated by a guardian.
2. Have an emergency transportation plan.
 - a. Have this plan in writing and keep a copy on the vehicle.
3. Have staff attend transportation training.
4. Have vehicles inspected annually.
 - a. Keep a copy on the vehicle.
 - b. Keep a copy at the facility.
5. Vehicle safety
 - a. Fire extinguisher.
 - b. First aid kit.
 - c. Proper working child passenger restraints.
6. Use a passenger transportation checklist.
 - a. Maintain this document for at least one (1) year.

DECAL has a vehicle check plan in place that may be used by your facility to ensure proper unloading of children. This plan can assist you to make sure no child is left behind on a vehicle.

Checking the Vehicle - To ensure that all children have been unloaded from transportation vehicles, regardless of whether the vehicle is equipped with a child safety alarm devices, the vehicle shall be thoroughly checked first by a designated Staff person who was present on the vehicle during the trip and then by a second designated Staff person, who may or may not have been present on the vehicle during the trip, to ensure that two checks of the vehicle have been completed.

1. The first check shall be conducted immediately upon unloading the last child at any location including, but not limited to, a field trip destination, arrival at the Program, and the last stop during transportation to home or school. The responsible person on the vehicle shall: physically walk through the entire vehicle; visually inspect all seat surfaces, under all seats and in all compartments or recesses in the vehicle's interior;



JANUARY IS MENTAL WELLNESS MONTH

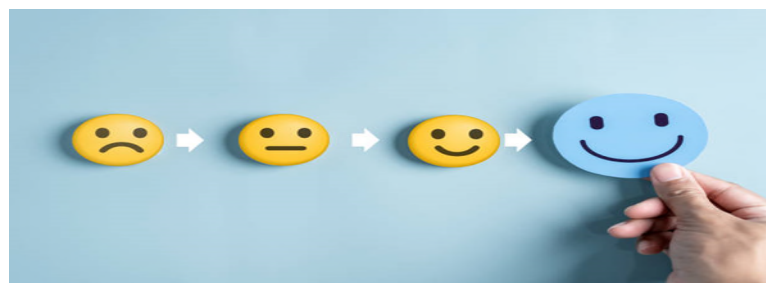
Emotional wellness is the ability to successfully handle life's stresses and adapt to change and difficult times. Since **mental health** conditions typically begin during childhood, adolescence, or young adulthood, just like reading and math, emotional skills should be taught. Our youth need to learn the names for their feelings and how to express them in appropriate ways—talking through them, perhaps, or taking deep breaths. Interestingly, some of them did not learn these types of lessons in their developmental stages, or if so, it would behoove them to receive a refresher course. While each mental health condition is unique, they all impact emotions, thoughts, and behavior.

If you encounter anyone having emotional problems, take heart. The good news is it's never too late to start the journey toward emotional wellness.

Emotional wellness doesn't mean being happy all the time. It's the ability to recognize and cope with emotions, good or bad. It's a lifelong journey as new challenges are thrown our way. "We're never done. That's the cool thing about human beings—we're constantly learning and evolving," says licensed therapist Erin Harlow-Parker, APRN.

Because even adults amazingly are works in progress, anyone can change course. Even children who have experienced hardship can heal and thrive. Here are some helpful actions and approaches to help them:

1. It's always helpful to engage in frequent emotional "check ins." If they see this as a routine part of school/family life, they will likely feel more comfortable coming and open when they experience challenges. Additionally, if something seems off, ask them about it, they may be more receptive and accommodating by sharing their highs/lowes and moments of disappointments. During those times when it is difficult to understand what is upsetting them, creating a safe space (a place where they can share openly without fear of retaliation) can suggest that you are eager to hear about their life in a supportive, non-judgmental way. This paves the way for them to see you as an ally, not as a judge.



Mental Wellness IS Important

Be intentional in taking care of it.

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. When it comes to your mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Even small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing – Boosting One’s Mental Wellbeing

View this Video:

https://youtu.be/_gJ5V525SCk?si=MT4p0rFa3KFa5_Qz

(right click on the link then open hyperlink)



FAQ for Exempt Programs Receiving CAPS Funding Categories 1 and 7 (only)

Annual Health and Safety Monitoring Visits:

The Exemption Unit will monitor the overall health and safety of your program which includes (but not limited to): the playground, restrooms, discipling techniques, diapering, safe sleep, storage of hazardous items, supervision, and staff/child ratios. The Exemption Unit conducts these visits on behalf of CAPS.

Review of Records:

During each visit we will review several administrative records which include staff and children files, arrival and departure records, transportation records, annual fire inspection report, the staff's CPR/First Aid certifications, Health & Safety Orientation and Annual trainings, parent's handbook, and medication records.

Criminal Record Checks for All Staff:

Because your exempt program is receiving CAPS, ALL staff members are required to obtain a satisfactory comprehensive record check (CRC) determination before beginning employment or being present with children. For directions on having staff members obtain their CRC, visit: <https://www.decal.ga.gov/CCS/CriminalRecordsCheck.aspx>

Can I Opt Out of These Visits?

No. These visits are mandatory as long as you are receiving CAPS. You can, however, opt out of the CAPS program.

What happens if I receive a Citation?

You will need to work with the Exemption Specialist on a plan to correct citations. Citations that are not corrected may result in sanctions including dismissal from the CAPS program.

Does this visit resulting in a Citation affect my Exemption Status?

No. These visits are completed for the purpose of monitoring health and safety standards on behalf of CAPS.

CAPS Scholarship Information

The Exemption Unit does not have direct access to your CAPS scholarships or account information.

I am having issues with CAPS payments. Can you help?

For questions and issues regarding scholarships and payments, you will need to contact CAPS directly at 1-888-442-2277. You can also send an email to CAPSProviderSupport@decal.ga.gov. Additional resources are available on the CAPS website @ www.caps.decal.ga.gov.

DECAL UPDATES AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Beginning January 1, 2024, Child Care Services (CCS) is excited to offer a free version of transportation safety training in the Online Learning Library Initiative (OLLI) on the Georgia Professional Development System for Early Childhood Educators platform ([GaPDS](#)). Program staff will receive 2 hours of training credit for taking the training course. To find this training, log into gapds.dec.state.ga.us and select "Find OLLI Trainings" under the Trainings tab. Then search for "Transportation Safety."



We are also delighted to announce Health and Safety Trainings are NOW available on GaPDS!

The trainings are listed as:

Health and Safety: Child Development- 6 hours

Health and Safety: Health and Nutrition- 5 hours

Health and Safety: Safety and Emergency Preparedness- 4 hours

Program staff will receive 15 hours of training credit for taking all three training courses, which will exceed the 10-hour Health and Safety Requirement for licensing/license exempt programs that receive subsidies from CAPS (categories 1 & 7). Please note: ALL three trainings must be taken to meet the Health and Safety Orientation requirement.

**PLEASE
NOTE...**

Registration for training courses in GaPDS closes 24 hours prior to the date of the training. It is recommended to register before that 24-hour time window in order to guarantee training registration.

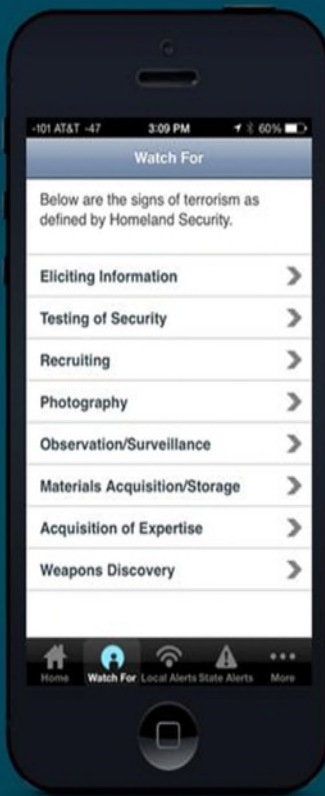
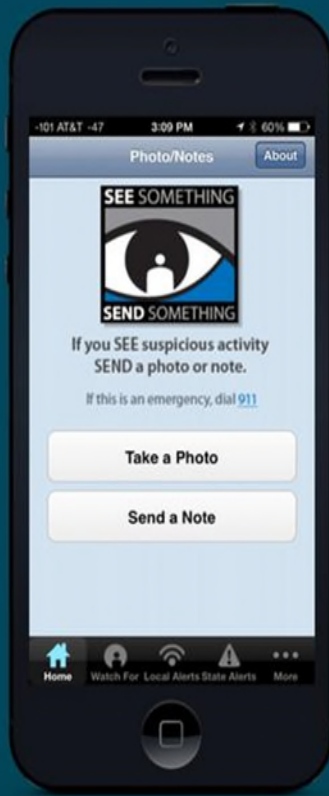
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"See Something, Send Something": Digital Reporting App Now Available in Georgia

"If You See Something, Say Something[®]" raises public awareness of the signs of terrorism and terrorism-related crime, and how to report suspicious activity to state and local law enforcement.

We all play a role in keeping our communities safe. It's easy to be distracted during our daily routines such as going to work, or school but as you're going about your day, **if you see something** that doesn't seem quite right, **say something**.

See Something? Send Something!



KEEP
GEORGIA
SAFE



DECAL Social Media



CONTACT INFORMATION

The Exemptions Unit is delighted to support programs that serve children and families in the community. Please contact us using the following:

E-mail: ccsexemptions@decals.ga.gov

Voicemail: 770-293-5977. We will respond to requests within one business day.

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
www.decals.ga.gov