

Making the headlines

Regardless of the facts, negative press coverage can prove disastrous for a business. **Del Sharman** of Pound Gates insurance brokers explains why early years settings should be prepared to cope with just such a crisis...

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of negative stories about the childcare sector appearing across local and national press. Whether the stories cover allegations of improper conduct by a member of staff or injuries sustained by a child in the setting, they will almost always hit the headlines before the incident can be properly investigated and the facts understood. In this intervening period and throughout the 'crisis' effective communication and management of the media is crucial to minimise reputational damage and the resulting impact on the business.

The problem, however, is that crisis management, media relations and communications are specialist areas requiring specialist skills, expertise and in-depth knowledge of how the media works. Most nursery owners will not have received training and support in this area and, of course, will not have the benefit of a public relations department (apart from the largest nursery chains) to manage these issues on behalf of the business. As a nursery owner you could quickly feel overwhelmed by the speed at which events could unfold, particularly where there is intensive media interest.

Protecting your business

There are two main elements to protecting your business against a crisis. The first is preparation and the second is having access to experts to help you when you need it most.

PREPARATION

It is estimated that more than 75 per cent of good crisis management takes place before the crisis has arisen. Effective recovery has its

roots in prudent preparation. In the intense heat of a major crisis or serious issue there will be little or no time for anything other than direct, active management of the situation. Organisation of resources and facilities, preparation of materials, development of contact lists and check lists can all be done in advance and kept regularly up to date.

ACCESS TO EXPERTS

An increasing number of insurance policies now include cover for Crisis Containment (also sometimes referred to as Crisis Management or Crisis Communication) providing you with access to expertise when you need it most.

Crisis containment cover

Crisis containment cover is designed to respond to a 'critical event' affecting the nursery. Wording will vary from one insurer to another, but typically a 'critical event' would include things like:

- death, injury or serious harm to a child in your care;
- an allegation against an employee involving a criminal act against a child.

In the event of a crisis the nursery would access the service by contacting a 24-hour crisis containment helpline. The nursery will then receive expert public and media relations advice and crisis management support.

The appointed experts would typically work with the nursery to actively manage the incident to reduce adverse or negative publicity and media attention towards the business. Typical activity would include:

- managing contact with the media;
- drafting media statements or press releases;
- arranging, supporting or representing the nursery at a press conference;
- preparing messaging for the nursery's website;
- working with the nursery to prepare suitable communications for parents.

The insurance policy would pay for the costs of this expertise (up to the set policy limit).

What should you do?

Check your insurance policy to see whether you have cover for crisis containment. If not, speak to your insurance provider to understand whether this is something that can be added.

find out more

Pound Gates has recently included Crisis Containment cover as part of its Pound Gates Nursery Insurance product. For more information, contact the company's Early Years Business Support Team on 0845 271 3262, email childcare@poundgates.com or visit poundgates.com

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