

# A Revolutionary Guide To Childcare

Childcare is a top priority for any revolutionary organisation worth its salt. People are our best resource. It therefore follows that the more people we include at every level of our organisation, the stronger we will be.

Let's imagine for a moment that you meet someone on the street – at a stall or on a demonstration, perhaps. You give them a leaflet for your forthcoming meeting. They thank you politely. However, what they don't say is that however much they might like to come along, their caring responsibilities prevent them. They assume, naturally enough, perhaps, that events like ours exclude carers like them.

What sort of responsibilities might they have? Possibilities include: care of any child or children too young to be left home alone (particularly restrictive where there is nobody else at home to share the job with); care of children with support needs; responsibility for a disabled adult; looking after an older relative who is ill, or has mobility issues. We must also be aware that carers come in many guises, and of all ages from teenagers upwards: mums, dads, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, grannies, grandads, foster parents...

We therefore have a fairly clear starting point: How do we make everyone feel included and welcome?

This guide is an attempt to provide some practical support with starting to answer this question. It is not a bible. Every child and every family situation is different. The best thing you can do is have a chat and work to find out what kind of support the carer would most appreciate. However, we can use as a starting point a description of the sort of thing our organisation often offers.

## General

Looking after other people's children is a huge responsibility, especially if you don't know the children / family personally. It is therefore advisable to err on the side of caution – leave the riskier stuff to the professionals / parents!

In general, if you're in a room adjoining the main meeting / event – the parent / carer is still in charge. In case of emergency, you could just holler out. This is a different scenario from if you're nowhere near the parents, in a far away room or on a trip out...

## Safeguarding

This is massively important. We cannot simply work on trust. If a parent or carer chooses to trust a friend to look after their little loved ones, it is not the same as the service we provide as comrades (unless it happens to be a friend who is helping with childcare).

If you have any concerns at all about the conduct of a comrade around children – speak up! Children are vulnerable, and can't speak up for themselves. Their needs are of a higher priority than those of an adult, however much we might not wish to offend a comrade / friend. If you think

someone's games are a bit boisterous, or have any other concerns – say so!

We should ask the child's grown-up to change nappies if the child is soiled, or take young children to the toilet if they can't go independently – even though that means pulling them out of the meeting. If we have professional childcare workers (who have CRB checks) this is different. Never take a child to the toilet, or change a nappy on your own – always have another adult with you. Nappies should only be changed in private areas, away from windows / passing public etc, protecting the child's dignity.

Keep your phones in your pocket, unless you're making calls related to childcare. It is best not to take pictures of the children in your care – this requires parental consent.

It's important to know where all children are at all times. Do lots of head-counts, even when you're only keeping tabs on 2 children – some kids are born escapologists. At larger events, you should keep a sign-in / sign-out sheet, but you'll hopefully have professional childcare workers who can keep you right on this! Do close any doors or openings that may invite escape attempts.

### **Going out**

If you're not insured – don't do it! If you have a childcare professional, they can take a lead on this.

### **Food**

It's best to let the children's grown-ups provide all food. This includes avoiding food-based activities. Some children have allergies to all sorts of food. These allergies can be severe and life-threatening. For those who suffer from such allergies, even the slightest trace touching the skin can lead to a medical emergency.

### **Medication**

Parents / carers should administer all medication. This avoids the need to store or administer medication (which has legal / training implications). If the child carries an inhaler, an EpiPen, or any other medication, and you have a professional in charge – let them lead on this. Otherwise, do not take the child further from the grown-up than an adjoining room.

### **First Aid**

It's good to always know where the nearest First Aid kit is, and if there are any First-Aiders in the building. As with medication, parents / carers should administer any First Aid – unless they agree to let a trained First-Aider treat their child. If you have a professional in charge – let them lead on this. Otherwise, do not take the child further from the grown-up than an adjoining room, in order to avoid taking responsibility for any First Aid emergencies for which you are not trained or insured (however few and far between they may thankfully be...)

### **Volunteers**

It is useful to have a list of volunteers who can help with childcare. We may be able to organise rotas. We can state what a politically important job it is. However, nobody should feel pushed into doing it if they don't want to. People may have a variety of reasons for not taking on this job – disabilities (hidden or visible), for example. It's better for the children if the people working with them want to be there and feel up to the job.

## **Paid Childcare**

Every local group should ask around to find professional childcare workers who can be called upon whenever they're needed. Registered Childminders are a great option, as they are insured to look take children away from their parents. Mobile creches are also a possibility, though these can be pricey.

## **Equipment / Activities**

It's worth having a box of resources to keep children entertained. This could be kept at someone's house, ready to take to regular / public meetings. It could equally be kept at your regular venue, if this is possible. It's best to be over-prepared than not have enough to do. Be flexible, too – every child is different, and will enjoy different activities and games.

### **What might you have in your box?**

- Paper (different sorts – white, coloured, notebooks, post-its, old envelopes cheap wallpaper or lining-paper for big pictures)
- Crayons, felt-tips, pencils, pens; kids' scissors; glue sticks; masking tape
- Glitter, stickers, string
- Paint, brushes, aprons / old shirts
- Playdough (you can make your own – Google the recipe!), playdough cutters – any old cheap biscuit cutters will do (NB – check for allergies)
- Wet-wipes (for cleaning both kids and surfaces where you might not have access to water and cloths)
- You could do junk-modelling if people bring old food-boxes etc – yoghurt pots and plastic bottles are good for musical shakers – just add rice or lentils! (NB – check for allergies – most nurseries avoid egg boxes – and toilet-roll middles for that matter!)
- You might work on the floor, possibly using mats / disposable tablecloths, or at tables, with chairs
- If you're expecting young babies it's nice to have a soft area, possible a big cushion or a big soft cover
- You may have an idea of the interests and needs of the children you'll be looking after, you could then choose your resources accordingly. A well-chosen DVD is always fun – you can borrow these from libraries or friends to save money
- Babies often find everyday items just as much, if not more fun than bought toys, which they soon grow out of anyway. Pots, pans, wooden spoons, sieves, boxes, emptying your purse, exploring the contents of your bag, stories, rhymes, your favourite song
- Remember that kids will want to do different things at different times of day – they should be allowed to be active during the day, whereas they might just want to chill in front of a DVD in the evening.

You don't need to spend a fortune – beg, borrow, steal, be creative – and above all – keep your eye on poundshops!!! The above suggestions are all good for open-ended play, to encourage imagination and creativity – there are no resources here which are necessarily gender-specific. In addition, carers / parents may wish to bring favourite toys, books or comfort items for their child. The key thing here is that they want to, and don't feel they have to – it's not always easy getting everyone fed, ready and out of the house AND organising a bag of tricks for a meeting.

Just one golden rule: always supervise children with resources. Even the best-behaved children will find amusement in writing on walls or cutting their hair if they can get away with it. It's your job to keep them safe – it's ok to say "no" sometimes, it can help children feel safe. Also,

remember that, if possible, the kids need to be quiet enough for everyone to be able to hear the meeting – calm activities are better than loud and exciting ones if you're in the same room as the meeting!

**Links to websites with useful resources (you need never be bored again!) :**

<http://www.activityvillage.co.uk>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/>

<http://www.channel4.com/4homes/how-to/craft/crafts-for-kids>

There are many more, including this, if you get chance to go outside:

<http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk>

## **Events, how to deal with them and what to think about**

### **Public Meetings**

If you're planning a big public meeting a while in advance, you should be able to organise decent childcare. You will not be able to completely accurately predict how many children will attend, but you should be able to confidently write on your leaflet, "All welcome."

Make sure your venue is fully accessible

You could have volunteers running childcare provision in an adjoining room, or a quiet corner of the main room – it is only for 90 mins or 2 hours, after all

You might prefer to pay a childcare worker to look after any children. This has the advantage of allowing everyone who wants to be part of the public meeting. Of course it will be an extra cost, but will that £20 break the bank?

After the meeting, does everyone go to the pub, or is there a decent cafe you can head off to?

### **National Meetings**

It is preferable at national meetings spanning 1, 2 or more days to have professional childcare. Children deserve to have quality childcare if it's for a day or more at a time. In addition, some parents / carers want to have confidence in the childcare provided – they may not say anything, but quietly just stay home with their children if they think they'll be bored – it's not fair on the child

You should plan childcare provision well in advance, and work out your rota of volunteers to support the childcare professional – let that person / people lead. Volunteers need to be enthusiastic and be prepared to follow the professional's advice

Make sure your venue is fully accessible

After the meeting, does everyone go to the pub, or is there a decent cafe you can head off to?

### **Regular Local Meetings**

Make sure your venue is fully accessible

You could have volunteers running childcare provision in an adjoining room, or a quiet corner of the main room – it is only for 90 mins or 2 hours, after all

You might prefer to pay a childcare worker to look after any children some or all of the time. This has the advantage of allowing everyone who wants to be part of the public meeting. Of course it will be an extra cost, and this may well not be sustainable on a regular basis

If some of the people who attend the regular meeting are friends of a parent or carer, they could organise a rota to babysit. Be very careful with this, though – the parent has to be very happy that this person is a friend they know and trust. This can be a solution for young children who need to be in bed during the time your meeting is held.

Remember that this last point applies equally to helping look after adults with support needs – some people may need help with looking after an older relative, for example, in order to allow them to attend meetings and events

After the meeting, does everyone go to the pub, or is there a decent cafe you can head off to?

## **Demonstrations**

Have the organisers of the event thought about accessibility issues? If your protest is about ATOS, or the Bedroom Tax, it's worth linking with disabled activists to see what their needs might be. For example, it's good to have rallies with easily accessible toilets, and generally plan accessible routes for marches – can wheelchair users easily negotiate the area? Is it wide enough? Is the surface even?

As with other events – does everyone head off to the pub at the end, or are there venues which are more child-friendly and inclusive?

## **Social Events**

Make sure your venue is fully accessible (or if it's by invitation only, run through the invited guests and make sure it's accessible to them)

If it's a food-based event, make sure you have catered for dietary requirements – veggie, kosher, halal, allergies etc as necessary

Avoid pubs for open public events – children are often not welcome if they don't buy a meal / want to stay up past teatime / at all!

Keep things as cheap as possible – people might not like to say that they're skint, but it's rotten being excluded from social events by cost

Have an informal volunteer bank and a few resources for any kids, so that their grown-up can spend at least part of the time relaxing and socialising with everyone – these opportunities can be few and far between for parents / carers!