

By ROBERT PIERCE

• Leader & Times

EDITOR'S NOTE: Information for this story was gathered from the Americans with Disabilities Act Web site, www.ada.gov. Future stories will deal with other frequently asked questions providers have about the connection between child care centers and the ADA.

Issues regarding specific disabilities

Q: Can we exclude children with HIV or AIDS from our program to protect other children and employees?

A: No. Centers cannot exclude a child solely because he has HIV or AIDS. According to the vast weight of scientific authority, HIV/AIDS cannot be easily transmitted during the types of incidental contact that take place in child care centers. Children with HIV or AIDS generally can be safely integrated into all activities of a child care program. Universal precautions, such as wearing latex gloves, should be used whenever caregivers come into contact with children's blood or bodily fluids, such as when they are cleansing and bandaging playground wounds. This applies to the care of all children, whether or not they are known to have disabilities.

Q: Must we admit children with mental retardation and include them in all center activities?

A: Centers cannot generally exclude a child just because he or she has mental retardation. The

center must take reasonable steps to integrate that child into every activity provided to others. If other children are included in group songs or on playground expeditions, children with disabilities should be included as well. Segregating children with disabilities is not acceptable under the ADA.

Q: What about children who have severe, sometimes life-threatening allergies to bee stings or certain foods? Do we have to take them?

A: Generally, yes. Children cannot be excluded on the sole basis that they have been identified as having severe allergies to bee stings or certain foods. A center needs to be prepared to take appropriate steps in the event of an allergic reaction, such as administering a medicine called “epinephrine” that will be provided in advance by the child’s parents or guardians.

The Department of Justice’s settlement agreement with La Petite Academy addresses this issue and others.

Q: What about children with diabetes? Do we have to admit them to our program? If we do, do we have to test their blood sugar levels?

A: Generally, yes. Children with diabetes can usually be integrated into a child care program without fundamentally altering it, so they should not be excluded from the program on the basis of their diabetes. Providers should obtain written authorization from the child’s parents or guardians and physician and follow their directions for simple diabetes-related care. In most instances, they will authorize the provider to monitor the child’s blood sugar – or “blood glucose” – levels before lunch and whenever the child appears to be having certain easy-to-recognize symptoms of a low blood sugar incident. While the process may seem uncomfortable or even frightening to those unfamiliar with it, monitoring a child’s blood sugar is easy to do with minimal training and takes only a minute or two. Once the caregiver has the blood sugar level, he or she must take whatever simple actions have been recommended by the child’s parents or guardians and doctor, such as giving the child some fruit juice if the child’s blood sugar level is low. The child’s parents or guardians are responsible for providing all appropriate testing equipment, training, and special food necessary for the child.

The Department of Justice’s settlement agreements with KinderCare and La Petite Academy

address this issue and others.

Q: Do we have to help children take off and put on their leg braces and provide similar types of assistance to children with mobility impairments?

A: Generally, yes. Some children with mobility impairments may need assistance in taking off and putting on leg or foot braces during the child care day. As long as doing so would not be so time consuming that other children would have to be left unattended, or so complicated that it can only be done by licensed health care professionals, it would be a reasonable modification to provide such assistance.

The Department of Justice's settlement agreement with the Sunshine Child Center of Gillett, Wis., addresses this issue and others.