

11144
12

ORGANISING A CRECHE

It can sometimes be very difficult for those with children to take an active part in trade union activities, and NALGO has long realised that the provision of creche facilities at meetings, seminars, weekend schools etc is absolutely essential if we are to help parents overcome the difficulties. A creche has now become a regular feature of Conference, and increasingly branches and districts are asking for information to help them set up their own for evening and weekend meetings.

This short guide to organising a creche is intended to help those branches and districts which plan to offer creche facilities at their meetings, and it is hoped that it will encourage others to consider doing so.

nalgo

CARTOONS BY **PEG**

Published by NALGO, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ.

WHERE TO START

The creche should be an integral part of your planning for the meeting or event. This means that from the start you should book accommodation that has a room (or, even better, two rooms) that can be used for the creche, and all publicity material should mention that creche facilities will be available. In your costings for the conference/meeting you should include payment and/or expenses for creche workers (at the very least you should reimburse them for fares, lunch etc).



THE ROOM(S)

Ideally you need two rooms - one for noisy and messy play, the other for sleeping, story-telling and other quieter activities. (Small babies sometimes find

the boisterous play of older children a bit too much to take and prefer to stay in the quiet room). The number of children you expect will obviously have some bearing on the number of rooms you use. It is quite likely that the first time you offer a creche there will be a fairly small number of children, so probably one room would do to start with.

If possible, try to arrange that the creche room(s) are close to toilet facilities, have a water supply (for painting, making orange squash, water play, washing hands etc) and are not so near the meeting room that the proceedings are disturbed. It would be disastrous to hold a meeting and a creche in rooms divided only by a thin room-divider! Avoid venues on busy main roads if you can, and always make sure that gates etc can be secured (children are sometimes too adventurous for their own good!)

INSURANCE

You must arrange insurance for the safety of the children and protecting the premises against damage by the children. You can do this through Norman Frizzell Ltd (tel 0202 292333; ask for the Non-Motor Department). If you intend providing creches regularly for your meetings, it is worth taking out annual insurance; otherwise you can insure on a one-off basis.

PUBLICITY

All posters, leaflets, advertisements in branch bulletins etc about the event should mention that a creche will be available. Any registration forms for weekend schools etc should ask whether the member requires a creche. Stewards/departmental representatives should be asked to publicise the creche wherever possible and to try to get some

idea of how many of their members will use it on those occasions (such as evening meetings) where registration forms are not used.

STAFFING THE CRECHE

No special training is required to help in a creche, but you must ensure that at least some of your workers have experience of babies and small children, since changing a nappy or calming a bawling child can be a bit daunting if you have never done it before. Most creches are run entirely by volunteers, but you might like to consider employing at least one person, especially if the creche is taking place over a weekend.

One member of the committee responsible for organising the meeting/conference etc should have overall responsibility for the creche and should decide staffing needs. He or she should act as a co-ordinator for the creche and should spend all his/her time

in it on the day of the conference. If the creche is likely to have more than 15-20 children, you should have two co-ordinators.

Unlike full-time nurseries (where all children are below school age) creches at conferences, meetings etc are likely to have to cater for children from a few months old to 10 or 11 years. This means that staffing ratios should be quite high. Adequate staffing is *essential*; babies do not sleep all day, and older children require more supervision than you might anticipate.

DHSS regulations stipulate that babies up to two years must have a ratio of three babies per member of staff, and local authorities usually stipulate that 2-5-year-olds should have a ratio of five children to one member of staff. There are no regulations governing older children. But these ratios are not really good enough to guarantee a smooth-running creche. If at all possible, aim for two babies per member of staff or three children per member of staff.

EQUIPMENT

Since it is hoped that a creche will become a regular feature at meetings, it is a good idea to begin to assemble a set of equipment, so that you do not have to collect equipment every time you organise a creche. The basic equipment you need for your permanent store is listed below (it falls into two categories - what you will need to buy, and what you should be able to collect by advertising among the membership).

To buy

All-in-one disposable nappies (eg Snugglers) in various sizes
Cotton wool, zinc and castor-oil cream for nappy changes
Tissues
A first-aid kit
Orange squash and biscuits
Play-do
Paints, brushes
Felt-tip pens
Paper
Scissors

Glue

Lego
Plastic sheeting
Aprons
Name badges
Large plastic rubbish bags

For reference

Children's song book
Book of children's games (eg *Mother Goose comes to Cable St*, Penguin, 80p)
Book(s) on things to make and do (eg *Making Things with Junk*, Collins, 95p)

To collect

Two cots and bedding
A jug (for heating feeding bottles)
Changing mat
Jigsaws
Toys for different age-groups (make sure they are safe)
Magazines (for collage)
Children's books
Yoghurt pots, egg cartons
Dressing-up clothes
An old TV set
An old record player and records

Men as well as women should be approached to work in the creche. For events arranged particularly for women (eg a meeting on maternity leave) most, if not all, of the workers should be men, so that as many women as possible can attend the meeting.

A shift system can work well (eg some staff do the morning session and others the afternoon session at an all-day meeting). But see *Other points*, opposite, where planning the activities and allocating children are discussed.

PARENTS

Clearly at late afternoon or evening meetings where a creche is provided, it is for a short period of time, and the creche itself should provide everything (nappies, sandwiches etc) except food and bottles for small babies.

A one-day or weekend creche is rather different. You are likely to know who is bringing children and can tell them precisely what you expect them to provide. You can also find out more about their children (which will help you to plan activities).

For a one-day or weekend creche parents should provide:

- **For babies:** Disposable nappies; prepared bottles (kept cold in polystyrene containers); a dummy if the baby uses one); *at least* one change of clothes.
- **For children:** A change of clothes.
- **Registration forms:** Parents should be asked to complete a special creche registration form (see *Model Form*, page 7). This should be sent out in advance, and you should acknowledge receipt.

LUNCH

You should decide at the outset whether or not you can or want to provide lunch for the children in the creche. There are a number of factors that should inform your decision. Below are listed the pros



and cons of providing lunch for the children:

PROS

- Lunchtime is often the period at a conference or meeting when valuable informal discussions take place, and all adult participants (parents included) will want to take part in them.
- By putting on a creche you are accepting a communal responsibility for the children, and this should extend to providing (and financing) food.
- If catering facilities are available, it is often easier to provide children's food half an hour or so before the conference breaks for lunch, rather than providing for children and adults together. If you do not provide lunch for the children, you would have to plan for a longer lunch-break in your conference programme. (Feeding yourself and your children and trying to relax takes time!)
- Lunch can be turned into a festive occasion for the children (they can help to get the room ready, help serve the food etc).

CONS

- Creche workers should have at least an hour's break during the day, and it is sometimes easier to provide this by closing the creche at lunchtime.
- Some parents are bound to prefer to pick up their children and have lunch with them. The children left in the creche sometimes get upset by this.
- It is often difficult to provide the range of food required by different age-groups. (Whatever you decide about providing lunch, it is probably best to ask babies' parents to bring food).

OTHER POINTS

- Make sure you have the telephone number of the casualty department of the local hospital.
- Locate the local parks and playgrounds.
- Check the premises for fire hazards,

and make sure all creche workers know what to do in case of fire.

● The creche workers should try to get together before the creche to discuss a division of labour (who is going to be primarily responsible for babies; assign children to particular workers; etc) and also to sort out what time they are needed at the creche to set it up etc. Map out a rough programme for the creche, eg dancing, painting, games in the morning; an outing in the afternoon. You almost certainly won't stick rigidly to it, but it helps to have some idea of what you could be doing.

Everything should be ready by the time the children start to arrive, and the creche workers should arrive at least an hour before registration starts. This gives you time to sweep up the room (if that is necessary) as well as set out toys and acquaint yourselves with the facilities. Ensure that there is something for them to get on with immediately, such as playing with Lego, exploring the toys etc. (This will help them to get over any tears).

THE CRECHE OPENS

Give each child a badge with his/her forename clearly written on it. Make sure that parents know who will be primarily



looking after their children. Introduce the children to each other, and get them playing in ones and twos at the beginning. There is no need to start with elaborate messy play or games, because the novelty of the creche and exploring what's there in the way of toys and other children should be enough to keep them happy until the conference/meeting is under way and all parents have left the creche. (Remember to make clear to parents that they are very welcome to pop into the creche whenever they want to. They need to feel happy about it every bit as much as the children do.) The co-ordinator should be on the look-out for children who are having difficulty settling and make a special effort to help them.

Then it's up to you. The books on the reference list should give you ideas for games and things to make and do. For the older children it is often a good idea to have a theme (eg making and assembling costumes and props towards putting on a play later in the day).

If the weather is fine, all the children (even the youngest) would probably enjoy an outing to the local park. But make sure you have a register of children you take, so that you don't lose anyone! Tell parents you intend going on an outing.

If you are expecting a lot of children, it might be worth spending money on getting a magician or a puppet show along to the creche.

FINALLY...

Remember, the aim is to run a happy and efficient creche, where the children enjoy themselves and the parents feel confident that their children are being well cared for. It doesn't have to be expensive, but it must be good. Write up an amusing account of the creche in the branch bulletin after the event. It could help to encourage more parents to take an active part in trade union affairs.

MODEL REGISTRATION FORM

CHILD'S NAME (please give name by which child is generally known)

AGE

ADDRESS

PARENT'S NAME/S

WHERE CAN WE FIND YOU DURING THE CONFERENCE/MEETING/SEMINAR?

ie which workshop(s) will you be attending?

HEALTH (any allergies, illnesses)

TOILET NAPPY POTTY WC (delete as applicable)

SLEEP (when and how long does child nap during day?)

OTHER DETAILS (rocked, sung to, position, dummy, teddy)

SPECIAL WORDS

SPECIAL POSSESSIONS
(if possible, please label clearly)

ANYTHING ELSE YOU FEEL CRECHE WORKERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR CHILD (you will of course have a chance to meet the workers to discuss this)

I hereby consent to receiving medical treatment if the creche workers or a doctor thinks it is required as a matter of emergency and I cannot be contacted following reasonable attempts to do so prior to such treatment being administered.

SIGNED

RELATIONSHIP

DATE

Please bring a change of clothes in a bag labelled with your child's name.

If at all possible, would parents of babies please bring a large carrier bag clearly labelled with child's name in which there are three separate bags containing:

- The milk/food your baby will need.
- Change of clothes.
- Disposable nappies.