

# Safety Tips

## Best Practices for Personal Safety for Special Education Staff



Working with special education students can be extremely rewarding, but can also be a very intense experience. With proper techniques and interventions, as well as instructional and behavior management strategies which will be shown to you in the classroom, aggressive behaviors from students can be minimized, but they may still occur. To avoid injury when dealing with aggressive behaviors, the following best practices have been recommended by special education administrators, teachers and teacher aides with many years of classroom experience in handling aggressive behaviors.

### Tips for Staff to Avoid Injuries in the Special Ed Classroom

#### Dress for Success

- Wear clothing that does not have strings or other items and decorations hanging off of them and that is not excessively baggy to avoid them being grabbed and pulled. It is also advisable to wear tops long enough to be tucked into bottoms and to tuck them in.
- Wear tops with long sleeves and long pants whenever possible, so that if bitten or scratched there will be less likelihood of skin being broken.
- Do not wear necklaces and ties, or if wearing necklaces and ties, tuck them in to prevent them from being grabbed. If wearing a tie is important; consider a clip on tie, so if it is pulled it will break free.
- Nassau BOCES ID tags must be worn, but should be clipped on or worn on break-away chains.

- Avoid wearing rings, especially ones with stones that are higher than the ring surface. If you must wear a ring with one or more stones, turn the stones of rings inward to avoid scratching others and getting caught on something.
- Do not wear dangling or hoop earrings to avoid them being grabbed.
- Tie back long hair, although be aware that a ponytail may be grabbed, as well.
- Wear sturdy, stable, closed-toe shoes with non-slip soles, so that toes are protected if stepped on and there will be less likelihood of tripping if you need to pursue a student. Flip-flops and sandals are not appropriate footwear in the special education environment.

#### Stand and Deliver

- Be aware of your stance at all times, including when sitting. Make sure that when standing, your feet are spread apart slightly for stability and that your knees are not locked. Do not sit on the edge of chairs, or lean forward or back. Make sure all four legs of the chair are firmly on the ground and that you sit squarely in the middle of the chair.
- Be aware of your body position relative to students. Try not to stand toe-to-toe or eye-to-eye with a student. If possible, stand one leg length away and at an angle off to the side, or from 1½ to 3 feet from students, so as not to encroach on their personal space, particularly when they are acting out.

**We never stand so tall as when we stoop  
to help a child...so watch your back**

Back injuries can come from improper lifting. Whether you are helping a child up who has dropped to the floor or are lifting a box, always bend at the knees, not the back. Lift with your legs and don't try to lift more than you can safely handle. Get help if needed.

**A Clean Classroom is a Safe Classroom**

Maintaining good housekeeping is an essential classroom activity that is everyone's responsibility and can help reduce hazards and prevent trip and fall accidents. Pick up objects you, your co-workers, or students may have dropped or left on the floor.

**Safety is in Your Hands**

Staff members sometimes note that they get colds when working in the classroom setting. This is due to working with children. Practice good personal hygiene and respiratory etiquette to help prevent the spread of germs. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly throughout the day and always before eating. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your elbow when sneezing and coughing. Encourage students to do this as well.



Following the safety tips contained on this sheet will help you to have a safe, meaningful experience while working with children with special needs. However, if you are injured during the course of your work day, you must report the incident to your supervisor. You must also go to the health office for first aid treatment and to fill out a BOCES Injury/Incident Report.



**DISCLAIMER:** This Safety Tips Sheet is being provided for educational purposes only and addresses common reasons for accidents. It is not intended to imply fault or negligence on the part of any employee. It is the law, policy, and intent of Nassau BOCES to provide a safe and healthful workplace. However, the basic responsibility for safety and health rests with all BOCES employees. The measures contained herein can help employees to ensure their safety.

Although the information and recommendations contained in this Safety Tips Sheet have been compiled from sources believed to be reliable, the Office of the Nassau BOCES Safety Coordinator makes no guarantee as to the correctness, sufficiency or completeness of such information or recommendations. Other or additional safety measures may be required under particular circumstances.

**For more information call the  
Safety Hotline 396-2400.**