

# Safe Supervisor

## Newsletter

Your front-line manager safety resource since 1929

JUNE 2026



### This Month's Highlights

This month we focus on building stronger workplace safety programs, from moving beyond check-the-box training to improving real-world skills verification.

We also explore the top ways to become a better safety trainer in 2026 and share practical meeting kits on childcare safety.

Read more highlights inside, and visit our site to view the full articles.



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# From Check-the-Box to Can-You-Actually-Do-It

## Why Safety Training Is Moving Beyond Completion Rates

For years, completion rates have been one of the most relied-upon metrics in safety training. They are simple, measurable, and easy to report. High completion percentages create a sense of confidence, suggesting that training has been delivered and that workers are therefore better prepared. In many organizations, these numbers have become shorthand for progress and control. However, this metric has always concealed a critical limitation: completion does not equal competence.

Workers can complete courses without truly understanding or being able to apply what they have learned. A supervisor may attend training but still fail to intervene when unsafe practices emerge. Employees may pass quizzes yet struggle to respond when real-world conditions deviate from ideal examples. Completion data shows exposure to content, but it does not indicate whether knowledge has been retained, understood, or translated into safe action. This gap has become increasingly visible as organizations recognize that incidents often occur despite high training completion rates.

Completion rates became dominant because they solve administrative challenges.

Organizations need to track who has received required instruction, provide documentation for audits, and demonstrate compliance. Learning management systems are designed to support this need. The problem arises when an administrative measure is mistaken for a performance indicator. A “green” dashboard may suggest that safety capability has improved, even when field performance tells a different story.

This creates a false sense of reassurance. Training records can give the impression that risk is under control, while in reality, workers may still struggle with hazard recognition, decision-making, or communication under pressure. Safety is not binary, yet completion metrics reduce it to a simple “done or not done.” In complex work environments—where conditions change, timelines tighten, and tasks require adaptation—safe performance depends on more than having attended a course. It requires the ability to interpret, apply, and act on knowledge in real time.

In response, many safety leaders are shifting focus toward skills verification and demonstrated proficiency. This approach centers on a more meaningful question: not whether workers completed training, but

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whether they can perform their work safely. This shift aligns with evolving regulatory expectations that emphasize proficiency and, in some cases, practical demonstration rather than passive participation.

Skills verification does not necessarily mean formal testing for every task. It involves gathering practical evidence that workers can perform key activities safely. This may include hands-on demonstrations, scenario-based discussions, verbal walk-throughs, or structured observations by supervisors. The goal is to reduce uncertainty about readiness by assessing what workers can actually do, explain, and recognize.

This approach also reveals an important reality: competence is uneven. Workers may understand procedures but struggle with hazard anticipation or perform well under normal conditions but falter under pressure. Skills verification helps identify these gaps, allowing for more targeted coaching and more effective retraining.

The shift is not without challenges. Unlike completion rates, skills verification is less tidy and more resource-intensive. It requires supervisors to observe work, provide feedback, and engage more directly in the learning process. It may also expose weaknesses in training programs or operational practices that were previously hidden. However, this discomfort reflects a more accurate picture of safety performance.

Supervisors play a critical role in this model. Positioned closest to the work, they can observe how training translates into practice and identify where workers struggle. With the right tools and training, supervisors can reinforce safe behaviours, address gaps early, and integrate learning into daily operations. This shifts training from a one-time event to an

ongoing process.

Leading organizations are not abandoning completion data but repositioning it as a baseline. They combine it with practical checks such as task demonstrations, field observations, and post-training follow-ups. This creates a more dynamic system where training effectiveness is continuously validated.

Ultimately, the move from completion rates to skills verification represents a shift from convenience to credibility. It replaces the comfort of clean metrics with more meaningful evidence of capability. While more complex, this approach better reflects how safety is achieved in real-world conditions.

The strongest programs are not abandoning completion data altogether. They are putting it back in its proper place.

A worker may complete an online module, then demonstrate the task with a supervisor. A new hire may receive onboarding content, then go through a structured field observation during the first week. A crew may complete a toolbox talk, then walk the site and identify what conditions would justify stopping the job. A supervisor may be asked not just to sign that training was delivered, but to confirm that the employee showed proficiency in the related task or hazard response. Near misses may be used as triggers for targeted skill checks rather than generic retraining alone.

The movement from completion rates to skills verification is really a movement from convenience to credibility.

The central question is no longer “Did the worker complete the training?” but “Can the worker perform the task safely under real conditions?” Answering that question with confidence is what defines effective safety training.

# The Top Ways to Be a Better Safety Trainer in 2026

*Traditional safety training—focused on delivering rules and collecting signatures—is no longer effective in today's fast-paced, complex workplaces. Regulators now expect training to be practical, easy to understand, and directly tied to real job hazards—not just delivered.*



To be effective, safety trainers must shift from lecturing to engaging. Talking less and creating space for questions, discussion, and demonstration helps reveal whether workers truly understand the material. Silence in training sessions often signals discomfort or confusion, not comprehension. The real measure of success is whether the trainer leaves knowing what workers don't understand.

Training must also reflect real work conditions. Generic examples quickly lose relevance, while specific, familiar scenarios help workers recognize hazards in their own environment. Strong trainers connect lessons to actual tasks, risks, and recurring challenges, making the material feel immediate and practical.

Another critical gap is communication. Recognizing a hazard is not enough—workers must know how to speak up. Effective training includes teaching the language of intervention: how to raise concerns, admit uncertainty, and challenge unsafe conditions. Without this, workers may remain silent even when they notice risks.

Clarity is equally important. Training must be understandable, not just technically accurate. This means using plain language, reducing

jargon, and ensuring workers can explain concepts back in their own words. If workers cannot do that, the training has not succeeded.

Supervisors require different training than frontline workers. Beyond hazard knowledge, they must learn how to observe, communicate, and respond to uncertainty in real time. Their ability to listen and guide teams directly affects whether safety practices are followed under pressure.

Modern safety training must also address emerging risks like heat, fatigue, and changing workforce dynamics. Trainers should proactively update content to reflect current conditions rather than relying on static annual programs. Storytelling and real-life examples further strengthen retention by making risks and consequences more tangible.

Finally, organizations must stop equating attendance with competence. Completion records do not prove understanding or safe performance. Effective trainers check comprehension through discussion, demonstrations, and scenario-based questions.

Ultimately, the goal is not polished delivery, but practical impact—ensuring workers can recognize risks, speak up, and act safely when conditions become unpredictable.

# Skills Verification

## How to Build Skills Verification into Onboarding, Toolbox Talks, and Supervisor Observations

Many safety programs fail because they measure training completion instead of real understanding. “Skills verification” is often seen as a complicated system requiring formal testing and heavy administration, but it can be much simpler. It can be integrated into existing activities like onboarding, toolbox talks, and supervisor observations. Rather than creating entirely new processes, organizations can strengthen current ones by confirming that workers can understand, explain, and apply safety knowledge in real situations.

The problem is that training is frequently treated as information delivery rather than readiness verification. OSHA guidance stresses that effective safety programs rely on worker participation, hazard identification, and continuous improvement. Injuries occur during routine work, not controlled training sessions, so readiness must be confirmed in real conditions. Workers may complete training and appear compliant while still lacking the ability to recognize hazards, adapt to changing conditions, or respond properly under pressure.

Onboarding is one of the most important opportunities to verify understanding because new workers face the highest risks. Orientation alone only introduces basic concepts. Effective onboarding includes workers explaining tasks in their own words, identifying hazards, describing when they would stop work, and demonstrating key steps. Follow-up observations during the first few weeks are equally important because they confirm whether understanding holds up once

workers face the pace and complexity of the actual job.

Toolbox talks are another missed opportunity. Too often, they are one-way reminders with no check for comprehension. Adding simple questions—such as identifying the day’s biggest risk, what has changed, or when work should stop—makes these talks more interactive and practical. Asking workers to discuss hazards out loud reveals misunderstandings and improves awareness, especially when discussions focus on real job conditions rather than generic topics.

Supervisor observations are where skills verification becomes most visible. Many observations focus only on compliance, such as PPE use or paperwork, but these do not always reflect real understanding. Effective observations examine how workers approach tasks, recognize hazards, and adapt to changing conditions. Short follow-up discussions help determine whether workers are thinking critically or simply following routines. Supervisors also need training in coaching and evaluation techniques, since technical expertise alone is not enough.

Skills verification should also improve systems, not just evaluate workers. Repeated confusion or errors often reveal gaps in training, communication, or work design. Verification helps organizations identify where learning has not transferred into practice, making it a tool for continuous improvement rather than blame.

# Safety Talk

## Bullying, Harassment, and Respect in Childcare Settings Meeting Kit

Respect in the workplace is more than politeness. In childcare settings, it directly affects safety, teamwork, and the emotional environment children experience every day. Bullying or harassment breaks down trust and increases stress. Over time, it can cause staff to stay silent about problems or safety concerns. A respectful workplace helps teams work together effectively and creates a calm, stable environment where children feel secure.

### What's the Danger

**Bullying and harassment** often develop gradually and may be minimized or ignored until real harm occurs.

**Cumulative Harm** Workplace bullying is often ongoing rather than a single incident. Repeated negative behaviours such as exclusion, criticism, or disrespect can build over time and affect how staff feel and perform at work.

**Psychological Injury** Bullying and harassment can contribute to anxiety, stress, sleep problems, and burnout. These impacts reduce focus, patience, and emotional availability, which are essential for working safely and effectively with children.

**Team Breakdown** When bullying goes unresolved, teamwork suffers. Staff may avoid communication, leave the workplace, or take more sick time. In childcare settings, this instability affects both staff wellbeing, and the consistency children depend on.

**Impact on Wellbeing** Workers who experience harassment are more likely to report poor mental health and dissatisfaction at work. This can create an unhealthy environment that affects the entire team.

### How to Protect Yourself

Preventing bullying and harassment starts with recognizing how harmful behaviour appears and taking clear action when it occurs.

Harmful behaviour is not always obvious. It can appear openly or through subtle patterns that build over time.

Common forms of harmful behavior include yelling, insults, threats, or public criticism, sarcasm, eyerolling, exclusion from conversations, or dismissive tone, gossip or withholding important information from coworkers or harassing messages through texts, emails, or social media and misuse of authority or power that makes others feel unable to speak up.

### How to Protect Yourself and Your Team

**Set Clear Expectations** Everyone should understand what respectful behaviour looks like.

**Address Issues Early** Small problems are easier to resolve than ongoing patterns.

**Document Objectively** If harmful behaviour occurs, record dates, times, what was said or done, and who was present.

**Use Reporting Processes** Reporting concerns is about accountability and workplace safety.

**Support Each Other** Coworkers play an important role in maintaining respectful workplaces.

### Final Word

Respect is not optional in childcare workplaces. It is a foundational safety practice. When staff feel respected and supported, they communicate better, make safer decisions, and provide higher-quality care. A respectful workplace protects everyone.

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# Safety Talk

## Violence Prevention: De-Escalating Parent and Guardian Confrontations Meeting Kit

Most interactions with parents and guardians are respectful and cooperative. Everyone wants children to be safe, supported, and successful. However, childcare environments can be emotionally intense. Stress, fear, exhaustion, or misunderstandings can cause conversations to escalate quickly.

### What's the Danger

Confrontations rarely begin at full intensity. They often build gradually through emotional cues and rising tension.

### Escalating Emotions

Stress or fear can quickly turn into anger. A parent may raise their voice, interrupt frequently, or repeat accusations as emotions increase.

**Personalization of Conflict** - Educators may begin to feel blamed or attacked. When this happens, it becomes harder to stay calm and focused on resolving the situation.

**Risk of Aggression** - Most confrontations remain verbal, but when tension continues to rise, the risk of threats, intimidation, or physical aggression increases.

**Impact on Children** - Children may witness these conflicts. Exposure to adult confrontation can cause fear, anxiety, and behavioral difficulties.

### How to Protect Yourself

De-escalation focuses on safety first and resolution second. When emotions rise, the goal is to slow the situation, protect everyone present, and prevent the conflict from

escalating.

**Recognize Early Warning Signs** - Pay attention to changes in tone, body language, pacing, or proximity. These signals often show that tension is increasing. Responding early can prevent the situation from escalating further.

**Stay Grounded** - Slow your breathing and keep your posture calm and open. Speak clearly and steadily. Your calm behaviour can influence the tone of the interaction.

**Use De-Escalation Language** - Acknowledge the person's feelings without agreeing with inappropriate behaviour. Calm phrases that show you are listening can help slow the conversation and guide it toward a solution.

### Safety Practices During Confrontations

- Keep a safe distance between yourself and the other person.
- Position yourself where you have a clear path to exit if needed.
- Avoid blocking someone's movement.
- Never use physical contact during a confrontation.

**Set Clear Boundaries** - If the conversation becomes aggressive, you can calmly state that respectful communication is required. If the behaviour continues, pause or end the interaction.

**Get Support** - If you feel unsafe, involve a supervisor or coworker immediately and follow workplace safety procedures.

### Final Word

De-escalation is not about winning arguments. It is about protecting people. Calm, confident responses help prevent harm, support respectful communication, and reinforce that safety comes first in childcare environments.

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# Safety Talk

## Background Checks, Reference Calls, and Screening Protocols in Childcare Meeting Kit

Every childcare organization is built on trust. Families trust that the people hired to work with their children will keep them safe, respectful, and well cared for. Staff also rely on their coworkers to act professionally and follow the same safety standards. Hiring decisions directly affect child safety, workplace culture, and organizational risk.

### What's the Danger

Unsafe hiring rarely comes from one obvious mistake. It usually happens when small gaps in the hiring process are overlooked. Shortcuts, assumptions about a candidate's character, or inconsistent screening practices can allow risks to slip through.

When steps like reference checks, background screening, or thorough interviews are rushed or skipped, important information may be missed.

**Incomplete Screening** – Skipping reference checks, rushing interviews, or delaying background checks increases the chance of hiring someone whose behaviour or values are misaligned with child safety.

**Overreliance on One Tool** – A criminal record check alone does not guarantee safety. Neither does a strong interview. Safety comes from multiple layers working together.

**Missed Red Flags** – Patterns like unexplained job gaps, reluctance to provide references, vague answers about past roles, or dismissive attitudes toward policies may signal risk if they are not explored.

**Pressure to Fill Positions** – Staffing shortages

can push organizations to lower standards. This is when safety is most vulnerable.

### How to Protect Yourself

Strong hiring practices help prevent risks before they enter the workplace.

Safe hiring is intentional, structured, and consistent. Strong hiring practices help ensure that the people joining your team are prepared to protect children and maintain professional standards.

Job postings and interviews should clearly communicate your commitment to child safety, professional boundaries, and ethical conduct.

Review resumes and communications for professionalism, consistency, and transparency. Early patterns in how candidates present themselves can provide important insight.

Ask candidates to describe how they handled real situations involving children, families, stress, and boundaries. Listen for accountability, calm judgment, and respect for safety protocols.

Trial shifts or supervised observations can reveal behaviour that interviews may not show. Watch how candidates communicate, follow instructions, and interact with children.

Maintain clear records of interviews, reference checks, and screening decisions. Consistent documentation helps demonstrate due diligence and protects both children and the organization.

### Final Word

Hiring is one of the most powerful safety controls in childcare. When you hire thoughtfully, you protect children before harm can occur. Strong screening does not create barriers. It creates safer, stronger teams.

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# Safety Talk

## Managing Illness, Outbreaks, and Hand Hygiene in Childcare Meeting Kit

Childcare settings are environments where germs can spread easily. Young children frequently touch shared surfaces, share toys, and place their hands or objects in their mouths. Because their immune systems and hygiene habits are still developing, even mild illnesses can move quickly through a classroom and affect children, staff, and families.

### What's the Danger

Illness can spread quickly in childcare environments when prevention routines are not followed consistently.

**Fast Transmission** - Children in group care experience significantly more respiratory and gastrointestinal infections than those cared for at home. Germs spread easily through hands, shared toys, and contaminated surfaces.

**Outbreak Risk** - Childcare settings are common locations for outbreaks of illnesses such as norovirus, influenza, RSV, and hand foot and mouth disease. One sick child can expose many others in a short period of time.

**Impact on Staff** - Illness does not affect children alone. Staff may also become sick, increasing absenteeism and placing additional pressure on remaining team members.

**Operational Disruption** - When illness spreads, childcare centres may face room closures, staffing shortages, and increased concerns from families, especially during cold and flu season.

### How to Protect Yourself

Prevention works best when hygiene and illness control practices are routine, visible, and

consistent every day.

Proper handwashing is one of the most effective ways to reduce illness. Washing with soap and water removes germs more effectively than sanitizer when hands are visibly dirty. Encourage regular handwashing throughout the day.

Viruses can survive on surfaces for hours or even days. Toys, tables, door handles, light switches, and bathroom fixtures should be cleaned and disinfected frequently.

### Key Infection Control Practices:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially before meals and after toileting.
- Clean and disinfect shared surfaces and toys regularly.
- Watch for early signs of illness such as fatigue or behaviour changes.
- Follow exclusion policies and keep sick children and staff at home.
- Improve ventilation by increasing airflow or opening windows.

Children often show subtle signs before becoming visibly ill. Responding early helps prevent the spread of infection.

Studies cited by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency show that improved ventilation reduces airborne virus concentration indoors. Fresh air is a simple but powerful control.

### Final Word

Infection control is not about fear. It is about routine. When hygiene, observation, and communication are built into daily practice, illness spreads less, children stay healthier, and programs stay open.

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# Fatality Files

## Escalated Parent Confrontation Leads to Safety Review

An educator experienced a confrontational interaction during pick-up when a parent became verbally aggressive over a misunderstanding. The conversation escalated quickly, and the educator felt unsafe as the parent raised their voice and moved closer.

The educator followed protocol, ended the interaction, and contacted a supervisor. The incident was documented, and leadership later met with the parent to establish communication expectations.

The review reinforced the importance of early de-escalation, physical positioning, and clear exit strategies to prevent harm.

## Recognizing And Reporting Child Abuse Or Neglect

A five-year-old child, referred to as Child W, died following significant safeguarding failures that were later examined in a published Child Safeguarding Practice Review (May 2025). Prior to the child's death, there had been multiple contacts with services and opportunities to identify escalating risk. However, concerns were not consistently recognized as indicators of significant harm, and critical information was not effectively shared between agencies. At one point, key partners – including the child's early years setting – were not contacted during referral

decision-making, limiting a full understanding of the child's lived experience.

The review concluded that earlier escalation, stronger professional curiosity, and more decisive action based on reasonable concern could have altered the trajectory of harm. The case emphasized that safeguarding duties are triggered by suspicion or indicators of risk – not certainty – and that hesitation, fragmented communication, or assumptions can prolong a child's exposure to danger. As a result, recommendations focused on improving multi-agency information sharing, reinforcing mandatory reporting responsibilities, and strengthening training to ensure early intervention when neglect or abuse indicators are observed.

## Norovirus Outbreak Leads to Temporary Room Closure:

A U.S. childcare centre experienced a norovirus outbreak after several children developed vomiting and diarrhea over two days. Initial symptoms were not immediately isolated due to staffing pressure. Within 48 hours, multiple classrooms were affected, and several staff became ill.

Public health officials identified inconsistent handwashing and delayed exclusion as contributing factors. The centre temporarily closed affected rooms, increased cleaning protocols, and reinforced hygiene training.

The incident demonstrated how quickly illness spreads when early controls are missed – and how decisive action limits long-term disruption.

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# Psychological Safety

## Training Teaching Supervisors to Listen, Not Lecture

In many workplaces, safety communication appears to happen regularly, but often amounts to little more than one-way broadcasts.

This gap highlights the importance of psychological safety in safety programs. When workers do not feel comfortable asking questions, admitting confusion, or raising concerns, even well-designed systems develop blind spots. Policies and training may be strong on paper, but without open communication, risks go unnoticed until they escalate. Psychological safety is not about comfort—it is about ensuring that important information flows freely so hazards can be addressed early.

Supervisors play a central role in shaping this environment. Their behavior determines whether workers feel safe speaking up or choose to remain silent. Many supervisors, however, were trained in systems that prioritized control, speed, and authority. While these qualities still matter, a purely directive, lecture-based style can suppress valuable input from workers who are closer to the task and better positioned to notice risks.

Psychological safety is an operational necessity, not an abstract concept. Workplace risks often emerge through small moments of uncertainty—when a worker is unsure about a procedure, notices a hazard, or hesitates to challenge an assumption. If these moments are not voiced, they can lead to incidents. A quiet team may appear compliant, but it may also be withholding critical information.

Listening, therefore, becomes a key safety skill. Effective supervisors actively draw out

information, ask focused questions, and pay attention to hesitation or silence. They understand that communication is not just about giving instructions but about testing understanding and uncovering concerns. In contrast, lecture-heavy approaches limit discussion and reinforce the idea that worker input is not needed.

Workers continuously assess whether it is safe to speak up based on how supervisors respond. Small reactions can discourage future honesty. Over time, workers learn that staying quiet is safer socially, even when it increases operational risk. This effect is especially pronounced for new employees, who are more likely to hide uncertainty to avoid appearing inexperienced.

Training supervisors to build psychological safety requires practical, behavior-focused approaches. This includes learning how to ask open questions, respond constructively to concerns, manage emotional reactions, and handle challenges without shutting down dialogue. The goal is not to reduce standards, but to create an environment where concerns can be raised and addressed before they lead to harm.

When supervisors adopt these practices, the impact is significant. More information surfaces, hazards are identified earlier, and teams coordinate more effectively. Workers become more engaged because they feel their input matters. Ultimately, the effectiveness of a safety program depends not just on procedures or training, but on whether people feel able to speak honestly when it matters most.

# Can Your Workers Perform Safely Under Pressure?

Organizations with strong training systems often develop a sense of confidence based on clean records, high completion rates, and well-managed learning platforms. However, this administrative strength can mask a critical gap: the difference between documented training and actual readiness in the field. This disconnect is one of the most significant and under-recognized safety challenges.

Training records are necessary for compliance and tracking, but they only confirm that instruction was delivered—not that it was understood, retained, or applied effectively. Many organizations mistakenly treat these records as proof of competence. This creates a false sense of security, where “green” dashboards suggest safety is under control even when field performance tells a different story. The more efficient and automated training systems become, the easier it is to fall into this trap.

The gap becomes most visible under pressure. Real work environments introduce complexity that affect how people think and act. Under stress, people rely more on habit, may skip steps, or hesitate to raise concerns. This highlights a key issue: training effectiveness cannot be judged solely by whether information was delivered, but by whether it can be used in real conditions.

This problem appears in predictable situations. New workers may complete onboarding yet feel lost once they face real tasks. Experienced workers may become overconfident and drift from procedures. Handoffs, unusual conditions, or equipment changes can expose

gaps between what was taught and what is actually understood. In each case, pressure reveals weaknesses that training records cannot capture.

Despite this, many organizations resist addressing the issue because it challenges existing assumptions. Acknowledging the gap can feel like questioning the effectiveness of training programs or leadership decisions. It may also require more time and effort to verify real capability. However, relying solely on completion data creates “blindness,” where organizations continue investing in training delivery without confirming its impact.

Safe performance involves more than knowledge. It requires hazard recognition, judgment, communication, and emotional control under pressure. Workers must be able to identify when conditions change, decide when to stop, and communicate concerns effectively. These abilities cannot be measured through completion rates alone.

Supervisors play a critical role in bridging this gap. Because they are closest to the work, they can observe how training translates into practice and identify where workers struggle. However, they need proper support and training to assess performance, ask effective questions, and provide feedback without discouraging honesty.

Ultimately, completion data should not be mistaken for competence. The most important question is not whether training occurred, but whether workers can perform safely when conditions become difficult.