

Electric Socket Covers Policy

We neither recommend nor criticise the use of socket covers by childcare providers, only that the environment in which they provide childcare is safe and meets legal requirements

Ofsted quoted in Nursery World 6-19 Sept 2011

From December 2012 the company will no longer be using electric socket covers within their settings. This has come about in light of recent reviews about the need of these for 'safety' and more importantly the possible dangers using them might cause.

Whilst Ofsted have ruled this is a decision for individual providers to make other agencies such as ROSPA, whose overarching aim is to prevent accidents, states it 'does not consider it necessary to recommend the use of socket covers' (ROSPA Sept 2011). In addition to this there are other companies actively campaigning for safety covers to be banned as they maybe unsafe in themselves.

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) member David Peacock has joined the campaign and explains: "In recent years, many companies have been marketing plastic 'Safety Socket Covers' in the misguided belief that these are an essential tool to prevent children from inserting their fingers or other objects into mains sockets. It has now been established that plug-in covers are actually unsafe".

Whilst there have been no cases of any children being harmed by socket covers it should also be noted that there have been no cases of children being harmed from sockets that have been left uncovered since a new generation of sockets were introduced in 1947. The website at www.fatallyflawed.org.uk provides us with more information. All our settings have had their electrics replaced after this time and therefore have 'safe sockets' in place already.

Mains sockets are designed with a safety feature; they contain a "shutter" inside. Only by inserting a plug, with a top pin (longer than the others), can the shutter be opened, which in turn activates the live part of the socket.

For a child to get an electric shock, they would need not only to stick their finger deep into the top hole, but also at the same time another finger into one of the other holes.

It is argued that some plastic socket covers are badly designed and may cause damage to the socket and this may increase the risk of harm, they can permanently damage sockets leading to a failure of the built-in safety mechanism and the possibility of earthing failure, over-heating and fire. Some safety sockets are easily removed and can then be placed upside down which opens the safety shutter and defeats the safety mechanism of the socket. Some do not fit properly and protrude or have holes which could allow for small objects to be inserted. Also if a socket cover breaks off in the socket it presents a problem because this can defeat the safety mechanism of the plug socket.

Whilst not conclusive the evidence available makes the point that British mains power sockets are among the best designed in the world and are already very safe. Additional covers are not proven to make them safer and could in some circumstances increase risk.

What does Ofsted say (September 2011)

Some inspectors are continuing to make judgements about risk to children when inspecting childcare settings where the provider has decided not to use electrical socket covers on exposed sockets.

Our position on the use of electrical socket covers has not changed. We neither encourage nor discourage the responsible use of socket covers as part of a risk-assessed approach to electrical safety. In line with the relevant requirements for registration, it is up to each individual registered provider to demonstrate to us that the environment is safe for children and meets legal requirements. It is for the provider to decide, as part of the risk assessment they carry out at their premises, how best to protect children from any dangers associated with electric sockets and appliances.

Inspectors should not set actions or make recommendations in relation to the use of socket covers and should not refer specifically to these in their reports. If a provider is unsure whether or not to use socket covers and asks our advice, we should refer them to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) and Child Accident Prevention Trust websites for information to help them make a decision about the use of socket covers and the type of sockets considered as 'safe'.

Do we have a Risk Assessment for this?

As we have this policy in place there is no need for a separate risk assessment. However if any particular room or setting require to undertake their own for a particular reason or in relation to a particular child then you may do so, consulting with the Health & Safety Manager if you need to.

Review of Policy

This policy is reviewed annually.

Review date – April 2021