



Day care worker charged with murder

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A day care worker in suburban Chicago has been charged with murder in the death of a 16-month-old boy, one of several day care employees across the country accused of harming children in recent weeks.

Melissa Calusinski, 22, is accused of throwing Benjamin Kingan to the floor of a Lincolnshire, Ill., day care center after she grew angry that the boy would not be quiet, according to police.

After being thrown to the ground, Kingan, who had a fractured skull, grabbed his blanket and crawled to his favorite bouncer seat, before he became unresponsive and died, Lincolnshire police said.

Kingan's family is scheduled to hold funeral services for the boy today.

Calusinski is charged with first-degree murder and is held in jail on \$5 million bail. She is scheduled to be arraigned Thursday. Her father declined to comment when reached Tuesday.

"I think they're doing horribly. It's an unthinkable, horrible tragedy," said one of the Kingans' neighbors, who asked not to be identified. "I can't even imagine what they're going through."

Lincolnshire police claim Calusinski gave a videotaped statement in which she allegedly admitted throwing the boy forcefully to the ground. Kingan died from blunt force trauma to the head, according to the Lake County coroner's office. Another employee in the room, which had a total of eight children, apparently did not see the incident, according to Lincolnshire police.

"This is something that we should not have to deal with in our society," said John Kolssak, director of the Kolssak Funeral Home, where services will be held today for Kingan.

Several Recent Instances of Alleged Child Abuse

Though there are no reliable national statistics on the number of deaths and serious injuries at day care centers, several cases of alleged abuse at day care centers in recent weeks offer a chilling reminder for parents who entrust their children to child care professionals.

Last week, a toddler fell into a pool and drowned at a day care center in Las Vegas. Police are investigating the incident but have not filed any criminal charges.

A woman in Kansas was recently sentenced to nearly three years in prison after a 6-month-old boy suffocated while in her care.

And also last week, police in Chandler, Ariz., charged Candelaria Bradford, 48, with second-degree murder in the death of Selenia Moreno. Police claim Bradford, a day care worker at Colorful Kids Preschool, leaned her elbow and forearm across the 2-and-a-half-year-old's neck and shoulders during an afternoon nap. Moreno was found unresponsive

According to police, Bradford, who is held in police custody, denied hurting the girl.

Despite the string of incidents, David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire, said such incidents are relatively uncommon and that children are more likely to be abused by a relative than at a licensed day care center.

Woman Accused of Kingan Child Murder Says She Loves Kids

On her MySpace page, Calusinski wrote that she loves kids and loved her job at the day care center.

The Minee-Subee in the Park Day Care Center where Calusinski worked has never been reported for suspected abuse. A background check on Calusinski turned up nothing when she was hired about a year ago, said Matt Walsh, an attorney for the center.

"There were no prior incidents involving this woman in any way, shape or form," he said. "Nothing would have given any indication that she would do something like this."

Dr. Richard Krugman, dean of the University of Colorado School of Medicine, who specializes in child abuse, said the two most common triggers for child abuse are inconsolable crying and a toileting accident.

He said a single person should not be left alone with a group of children for long periods of time.

"You have to give everyone a lifeline. Sometimes children can drive you up the wall," he said.

He recommended that parents should check on new day care centers, dropping in unannounced during the first week they leave their children there.

He also said parents should ask day care workers how they feel when a baby is crying or when a baby wets itself.

Finkelhor said day care centers should make sure employees talk to and report co-workers who are having problems with children.