

In order to sustain a safe environment for children, the Child Care Licensing Regulation requires care providers to ensure that children are supervised at all times. We are frequently asked to provide more detail on this subject, specifically, “What exactly constitutes adequate supervision?” We have reviewed several sources of literature and find that the outcome based approach referred to in articles by Sonja Tansey for the National Childcare Accreditation Council provides helpful information the definition of supervision. We have taken some key ideas from this article.

Supervision is the most important element in the safe provision of child care. Supervision, together with thoughtful design and arrangement of children’s environments, can prevent or reduce the likelihood of accidents and the severity of injury to children. Children often challenge their own abilities but are not always able to recognize the potential risks involved. Child care providers need to actively supervise children to identify risks and therefore minimize injury.

Active supervision will also ensure that children’s play is enjoyable and their learning opportunities are promoted. By watching children closely, child care providers will be able to see opportunities for supporting and building on children’s play experiences. Child care providers will also notice when children wish to play independently of adult involvement.

Determining the required level of direct versus indirect supervision is a decision that only the child care provider can make. Effective supervision will only be achieved if care providers are aware of the children and their environment. Child care providers need to access the needs of every child and supervise according to the development of each child. For example, young children will require close monitoring at all times; however, for older children it is important to balance the need for close supervision with respect for their age developing independence.

Thoughtful consideration and good communication with families and among all staff is important to establish consistent and appropriate supervision. Families should be invited to express their views about their children’s supervision. Policies and procedures should be developed and reviewed regularly.

Active and Positive Supervision

Care providers who are involved, aware and appreciative of children’s behaviours are in the best position to safeguard their well-being. Here are some points to consider:

Know each child’s abilities: Jennifer, a very active two year-old, is fascinated with climbing but has yet mastered the skill of coming down the ladder. Carlos, also age two, can manage this very well.

Establish clean and simple safety rules: “Inside we walk”, “We climb up the ladder and come down the slide” and “Our toys stay on the ground when we climb” are rules that young children can understand. For school age children staff could invite them to be involved in deciding the limits for their behaviour, for dealing with conflict and possible consequences if the rules were not followed. When school age children are involved in setting rules they are more likely to understand, abide by the limits set and reinforce the limits with each other.

Be aware of potential hazards: The log in the play yard is a source of much imaginative play. However, after a heavy rain or cold spell, the log is slippery and therefore “off limits” to the children. Extra attention is required to ensure that children are closely supervised on field trips. Pre-planning of field trips assists with identifying the potential hazards and supervision issues.

Position yourself strategically: Standing nearby or being in the block play area will encourage Sally to remember the rule “Your building can be as tall as you are” and discourage Michael from throwing blocks in frustration. Your presence not only serves as a reminder but also enables you to intervene quickly when needed.

Scan and circulate: Looking “up and out” and moving “with the action” are the best ways to be aware of the group as a whole and to anticipate potential trouble spots. Facing the open play space enables you to move quickly to the climber when you see the line-up growing. In facilities with more than one staff person, it is best to develop a plan of supervision and to avoid congregating together while supervising.

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Focus on the positive rather than the negative: Telling Dianne “Keep the water in the bucket” rather than “Don’t splash the water” is a positive way to teach her what is safe for herself, others and the environment.

Redirect: Paul, a toddler, has a tendency to bite when frustrated. Knowing this and positioning yourself close at hand will enable you to offer him a hard, plastic biting toy when needed. With Suzy, a two year-old who has a tendency to hit others when angry, you might redirect her to the play dough table to “pinch and punch” something that cannot be hurt.

Indicators of Active and Positive Supervision

The following statements are indicators that can help you determine if you are providing adequate supervision. They may also help you identify areas for improvement in your practice and provide you with some ideas for developing written policies and procedures for your facility that are intended to guide care providers in the care and supervision of children.

- I supervise children according to the development of each child.
- I have arranged the furniture, equipment and play space strategically to assist with supervision.
- I position myself and circulate the room so that I can see and/or hear the children at all times.
- I avoid carrying out activities that will distract me from supervision, such as administrative tasks, texting, social media, chatting with fellow staff members or speaking for long periods on the phone.
- I am present to help children resolve conflict.
- I spend quality time with each child on a daily basis.
- I use a monitor and conduct regular visual checks while children are napping.
- All of the children are on the same level of the facility at one time.
- I take all children outside at the same time and I remain with them at all times, unless the staffing ratio is sufficient to ensure continuous supervision occurs both indoors and outdoors.
- I am able to monitor children in the bathroom while respecting their need for privacy.
- If a friend arrives at my door I ask them to return at a more convenient time.
- I have taken measures to ensure children cannot exit the facility unattended and that children do not gain access to areas that require increased supervision (i.e. staircase).
- The activities and/or equipment are developmentally appropriate for the children in my care.
- I am aware that any activity where children play with, near or in water poses a high safety risk and I will consult with Licensing if I have any questions.
- I have planned and prepared for the day by having all supplies on hand so that I do not have to leave children unsupervised to find something.
- My facility is staffed in accordance with the Child Care Licensing Regulation to ensure the staff to child ratio is maintained at all times.

When supervising children, it is essential to monitor what is happening on a continual basis so that you can instantly intervene to protect their health and safety. If something does happen, you will need to be able to explain the details of the incident, your facility’s supervision practices, staffing levels and what preventative measures have been put into place to ensure children are safe and not in danger or at an unacceptable risk of harm.

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