



Supervision of Children

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 fit best with the way that we practice licensing in Northern Health. 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 assess 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. For more information, the complete version of Sonja Tansey’s article can be found at http://www.ncac.gov.au/factsheets/oshcqa_factsheet2.pdf

Active and Positive Supervision

Care providers who are involved, aware and appreciative of young children's behaviors 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 not yet mastered the skill of coming down the ladder. Carlos, also age two, can manage this very well.

Establish clear 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.

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.

Position yourself strategically

Standing nearby or being in the block play 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 while sitting at the art table enables you to move quickly to the climber when you see the line-up growing.

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 playdough 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 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 am present to help children resolve conflict.
- I spend quality time with each child on a daily basis.
- I can hear or see the children while they are napping.
- When I take phone calls, I maintain supervision of the children.
- 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.
- All children are brought in from outside at the same time.
- 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.
- The activities and/or equipment are developmentally appropriate for the children in my care.
- I have planned and prepared for the day by having all supplies on hand so that I don't have to leave children unsupervised to find something.
- A second adult is immediately available to supervise children in the event I need a replacement because of urgent and unforeseen circumstances.

When supervising young 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 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. If you require further information, your Licensing Officer or Child Care Resource and Referral office may be able to help you find additional resources.