

Effective supervision is essential for creating outside school hours care environments that are safe and responsive to children's individual and group needs. Supervision will reduce children's injuries and allow staff to interact meaningfully with and respond to the children.

The importance of supervision

Supervision is part of the duty of care that requires staff to attend to children at all times. Supervision, together with thoughtful design and arrangement of children's environments, can prevent or reduce the severity of injury to children. Children often challenge their own abilities but are not always able to recognise the potential risks involved. Staff need to actively supervise children to identify risks and therefore minimise injury.

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

Supervision requirements

Australian states and territories have licensing regulations and/or national standards that relate to the supervision of children. These detail the supervision ratios of staff to children and the responsibilities and qualifications of staff. The Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQA) *Quality Practices Guide* requires that, regardless of variations that may occur between states and/or territories, staff should supervise all

areas available to children. This can be achieved through the use of various levels of active supervision.

The service's insurance agency may also have requirements for the supervision of children. The service should obtain a copy of the insurance policy, licensing regulations and/or standards and ensure that it complies with these.

Active supervision

Effective supervision will only be achieved if staff are aware of the children and their environment. Staff should avoid carrying out activities that will distract them from supervision, such as administrative tasks or speaking for long periods on the phone. If staff are required to move away from active supervision, another staff member must replace them. Careful positioning of staff should allow them to watch the maximum area possible. It is important for staff to move around to ensure the best view of the area and to avoid standing with their backs to children.

In outside school hours care settings a wide range of ages are catered for. School age children can range between four and twelve years of age. It is important for staff to assess each situation 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 and developing independence. A well defined private space, that is monitored at regular intervals, can provide older children with opportunities to assume greater responsibility and self-management.

Each situation needs to be assessed to determine the level of supervision required. This will depend on the difficulty of the children's activity and the potential for an accident to occur.





Direct and constant monitoring in close proximity to the children is useful for activities that involve some risk, for example, activities that are new to children, woodwork activities, cooking experiences and any children's play that is in or near water. Remember to revisit safety rules with children before commencing activities that involve risk.

Scanning or regularly looking around the area to observe all the children in the vicinity will ensure that all children are actively supervised. This is useful when staff are directly involved in an activity with an individual child or group of children but need to supervise surrounding areas.

Listening closely to children will help supervise areas that may not be in a direct line of sight. This is particularly useful when supervising areas where children may be playing in corners, or behind trees or play equipment.

Anticipating children's play will allow staff to assist children as difficulties arise or to intervene where there is potential danger to children.

Staff can position themselves to effectively supervise all areas accessible to children. When choosing a position consider any obstacles to seeing or hearing the children, and whether staff are located in the best position to supervise and interact with children.

Being aware of what is known about each child and the level of supervision they need will improve supervision procedures. Also consider what other activities are happening in the space and what affect they might have.

Ensure that there is a mixture of activities to allow for appropriate supervision and to ensure that staff resources are not stretched.

Involve children in setting rules

To assist with supervision, staff should invite children to be involved in deciding the limits for their behaviour, for dealing with conflict, and possible consequences if the rules are not being followed. When children are involved in setting rules setting they are more likely to understand the reason for them. This will encourage them to abide by the safety limits for play and to reinforce these limits with each other. Children can also be invited to participate in the development of service policies and procedures that affect their supervision at the service.

Preventing harm

For supervision to be effective it should prevent or reduce the severity of injury to children. However, this should be balanced with allowing children to play and interact with each other free of adult involvement. Staff will be better able to supervise and interact with children if they are working in an environment that is safe.

To support child safety:

- Conduct regular safety checks of the premises to identify and remove hazards
- Establish emergency and evacuation procedures
- Supervise in close proximity to the children
- Monitor children's health by checking for early signs of illness and unusual behaviour particularly when supervising children with known medical conditions
- Supervise children's departure from the service to ensure they are only released into the care of authorised people
- Watch children's play and behaviour to ensure they do not result in injury or harm to the children
- Design and arrange environments to allow staff to monitor children's play with ease

Children's toilets

Children's toilets will often be located away from the main premises of the service. For this reason staff need to be constantly aware of children's safety when they use the toilets. Be vigilant in monitoring when children return, and visit the toilet area if the children have not returned within a reasonable time. Children should be involved in setting safety rules and staff need to ensure that children understand these rules.

When supervising children using the toilet area consider the following:

- Do staff check the children's toilet areas before each OSHC session?
- How do staff ensure children's safety and confidence when visiting toilet areas after dark?
- Are children aware of the safety rules for the toilet area?
- Do staff actively monitor children's return from toilet areas?
- Does the service communicate any maintenance, safety and hygiene concerns about toilet areas to the appropriate organisation?
- How do staff ensure the safety of children who need to use the toilet when on an excursion?
- Is there a 'buddy' system for children using toilets that are out of sight of staff?

Supervising the transition from school to care

The service should clarify who is responsible for the supervision of children while they are waiting to be collected from the school by OSHC staff. It is useful to work on a strategy with the school that covers issues of transition between the school and the service. It is also useful to communicate with a regular contact person from the school about dropping off and collecting children from school. In developing a transition strategy with the school consider the following:

- Does the service provide the school with up to date lists of children attending the service?
- What arrangements are made if staff are late in collecting children?
- Is there a regular safe area from which children are collected?
- Are there contingency arrangements for vehicle breakdowns or late collection of children?



Supervising transport

When supervising the transportation of children to and from OSHC premises, services must comply with the regulations/standards determined by relevant state and territory authorities or agencies. Services also need to comply with the requirements of road transport regulations and recommendations from road safety awareness programs.

When supervising children's transport consider the following:

- Do transport vehicles meet the requirements of appropriate road transport regulations?
- Do staff follow school transport safety recommendations?
- Do staff check that all children attending the service are in the vehicle before departing?
- Are staff and children aware of recommendations for walking to school safely? For example, holding the hands of children under eight years when crossing roads.
- Are children and staff correctly seated during transport?



Excursions

When planning excursions, services must comply with the regulations/standards determined by relevant state and territory authorities or agencies. A greater ratio of staff to children will often be required when taking children on an excursion outside the service premises. Written authorisation for the child to participate in an excursion will also be required from the child's parent or legal guardian.

Extra attention is required to ensure children are closely supervised during excursions. Careful planning of destinations, transport, meals and toilet breaks will help to determine the level of supervision required. This will also assist in identifying potential hazards and supervision issues.

If additional adults are required to assist with the excursion, they will need to be fully informed of the supervision and safety requirements. It can be useful to allocate a specific group of children for each adult to supervise for the whole excursion. Children can be closely monitored by regular roll calls and head counts throughout the excursion and by ensuring adults remain in close proximity to the children.

Supervision near water

Services must comply with the regulations/standards determined by relevant state and territory authorities or agencies when supervising children in or near water. Any activity where children play with, near or in water poses a high safety risk. Drowning is a common cause of preventable death of children in Australia.

Direct and constant supervision is required when children are playing in or near water. Staff should have constant visual contact and be in close proximity to all children at all times. If staff need to move away from the area being supervised they must be replaced by another adult or discontinue the activity. State and territory authorities and agencies may also require that staff qualified in first aid and water rescue be in attendance when children are swimming.

Ensuring constant supervision

Staff will often need to respond flexibly to children's and families' needs while maintaining supervision standards.

Policies and procedures that address supervision can promote consistency in staff practice. These should be developed and regularly reviewed by staff and management. This will assist in developing a common understanding and agreement about supervision standards in the service. Families should be invited to have input to express their views about the policies regarding the service's supervision of their children. Services may choose to address supervision through a range of policies or one over-arching policy that encompasses all aspects of supervision.

Staff rosters and routines should be designed to maximise the consistency of supervision of children by ensuring that:

- Required staff to child ratios are maintained at all times
- Staff are available to greet and farewell children and families on arrival and departure
- Supervision standards are maintained during staff breaks
- Children are well supervised during travel and monitored when going to the toilet

Further Information

- Bender, J., Flatter, C H., and Sorrentino, J M. (2000). *Half A Childhood. Quality Programs for Out-of-School Hours*. Nashville, Tennessee: School-Age NOTES.
- Department for Community Development, Government of Western Australia (2002) *Outside School Hours Care Licensing Manual* (1st ed.). Western Australia: Department for Community Development, Government of Western Australia.
- Musson, S. (1999). *School-Age Care. Theory and Practice Second Edition*, Canada: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.
- National Childcare Accreditation Council. (2003). *Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance Quality Practices Guide*. Sydney, New South Wales: National Childcare Accreditation Council.
- The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre, Melbourne. (2005). *The Royal Children's Hospital Child Safety Handbook Second Edition*, Victoria: The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre.

Useful Websites

- Kidsafe website - www.kidsafe.com.au
- Roads and Traffic Authority NSW - www.rta.nsw.gov.au



For more information on OSHCQA please contact a NCAC Child Care Adviser.

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