

Supervision in Children's Services

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Children need safe, secure child care environments which are effectively supervised. Carers have a duty of care to ensure all areas accessible to children are safe, free from hazards, and there are sufficient carers to oversee the children's activities. The type of supervision required, however, will change depending on the program and activities, the layout of the physical space, and the individual needs of the children.

It is a requirement of each Child Care Quality Assurance system that the areas accessible to children are supervised. Australian states and territories have licensing regulations and/or national standards that also detail the carers' responsibilities and the ratio of carers to children.

Children often challenge their own abilities but are not always able to recognise the potential risks involved. While thoughtful playground and building design can prevent or reduce the severity of injury, active supervision enables carers to quickly respond to children's needs.

'Supervision by an adult is a key factor in playground safety... In supervising play the carer should make sure that the child uses equipment which is appropriate for his/her age/size.'
(The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre, Melbourne, 2005).

Supervision can also ensure that children's play is enjoyable and their learning opportunities are promoted. Through careful observation, carers will see opportunities for supporting and building on children's play experiences and identify when children wish to play independent of adult involvement.

Active supervision

Carers effectively supervise children by actively watching and attending their environment. Carers should avoid carrying out activities that will draw their attention away from supervision such as reading or speaking on the phone. If carers are required to move away from actively supervising children they should make sure they are replaced by another carer.

This article relates to:

FDCQA: Principle 4.1, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6

OSHCQA: Principle 7.1, 7.2

QIAS: Principle 5.2, 5.3

Active supervision of children can be achieved in the following ways:

- Direct and constant monitoring by carers in close proximity to children is useful for actively supervising activities that involve some risk, for example wood work activities, cooking experiences and any children's play that is in or near water
- Careful positioning of carers to allow them to observe the maximum area possible. By moving around the area carers can ensure the best view possible, and that they are always facing the children
- Scanning or regularly looking around the area to observe all the children in the vicinity is useful when carers are supervising a large group of children
- Listening closely to children near and far will help to supervise areas that may not be in the carer's direct line of sight. This is particularly useful when listening out for sleeping babies through a monitor or when supervising areas where children may be playing in corners, behind trees or play equipment.
- Observing children's play and anticipating what may happen next will allow carers to assist children as difficulties arise and to intervene where there is potential danger to children
- Balancing activities to ensure risk is minimised and there are sufficient carers to attend to children's needs

When thinking about your service's daily routines and program consider what method(s) of supervision should be used for:

- High risk activities
- Activities children are commencing for the first time
- Large groups of children
- A group of 14 nine year old children playing football
- Bathing a four month old baby
- An excursion
- Toileting



Tools to aid effective supervision

Supervision is not just watching the children. Carers can improve the environment for children and use a variety of techniques to ensure effective supervision. The list below includes some suggestions:

Conduct safety checks

The child care environment should be inspected and monitored for hazards that could lead to poisoning or injury. Services should have safety check systems in place that allow carers to easily monitor, report and remove hazards. Carers should have an ongoing awareness of the safety of products and equipment in areas accessed by children. Regular checks for spiders, vermin and foreign objects such as syringes and broken glass are also necessary.

Position carers in close proximity to children

Carers should be close enough to children to intervene promptly and prevent injury. This is particularly important when children are attempting an activity for the first time or

engaged in a high risk activity. For example, if children are using play equipment such as climbing apparatus, carers should be close enough to reach the child if they slip or fall. If a group of older children are involved in a game of cricket, staff should be close enough to take first aid action if required.

Monitor children's health

Children with early signs of illness and atypical behavior should be closely monitored and appropriate action taken. This is particularly important when supervising children with known medical conditions. Carer training in first aid and cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) will ensure the severity of injury is reduced should an accident occur.

Supervise children's departure

When supervising children's daily departure from the service, carers should be aware of the people who have the authority to collect the child. The service should only ever release children into the care of authorised people.

Observe play and behavior

Children's play and behaviour should be observed to ensure no injury or harm occurs. Often carers can anticipate children's play and intervene when they see the potential for harm. This should be balanced with allowing children the freedom to attempt new experiences and to play independently.

Position equipment and arrange the environment

Well designed environments will take supervision into account and allow carers to monitor children's play with ease. For example, an open plan outdoor play area with low-level landscape features will create open sight lines that make supervision easy. It will allow carers to move around effortlessly and view play areas from several different angles. Environments that allow accessible and visible monitoring of children's rest and toilet areas will also contribute to effective supervision.



Play areas designed for safety will also assist in the supervision of children and will include:

- Safe fall zones
- Good traffic flow
- Ongoing maintenance of buildings and equipment
- Minimal trip hazards
- Platforms with guardrails
- Equipment that does not have pinch points, sharp edges, things that protrude or tangle or that may cause entrapment

It is important to note that the design and arrangement of children's play environments should be safe enough to allow adults to freely interact with children without being required to continually check for hazards. Children's play environments should also allow for some privacy and opportunities for independent play.

Many child care services operate in buildings/spaces that were not originally intended to be child care services. If time and money were no obstacle many service providers would make substantial changes to the layout and design of the service. But carers can make a big difference to the way they supervise by positioning furniture and equipment within the space. Consider how the placement of equipment in your service impacts on your ability to effectively supervise.

Supervision on excursions

When planning excursions, services must comply with the various requirements of state and territory licensing bodies and/or national standards. A greater ratio of carers to children will often be required when taking children on an excursion outside the service premises.



Extra diligence is required by carers to ensure children are closely supervised during excursions. Careful advance planning of destinations, transport, meals and toilet breaks will help to identify potential hazards and to determine the level of supervision required.

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

Constant supervision near water

Services must comply with licensing regulations and/or national standards 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 particularly for children aged 5 years and under in Australia. Kidsafe reports that, on average, each week in Australia one child dies from preventable drowning.

Therefore direct and constant supervision is required at all times when children are in or near water. This means staff and carers should have constant visual contact and be in close proximity to all children at all times. If carers need to move away from the area being supervised they should be replaced by another adult or take the children with them. Licensing regulations may also require the presence of an adult qualified in first aid and water rescue to be in attendance when children are swimming.

How do we ensure consistent supervision by staff and carers?

There are many moments in the busy day-to-day operations of a child care service where carers will need to respond flexibly to children's and families' needs whilst maintaining supervision standards.

Policies and procedures that address supervision can promote consistency of carer practice. These should be developed and regularly reviewed by carers and management to ensure a common understanding and agreement about supervision standards in the service. Families should be invited to have input to the policies to allow them to express their views.

Services may choose to address supervision through a range of policies, such as toileting and nappy changing, sleep and rest, and excursions. Alternatively one overarching policy may be developed that encompasses all aspects of supervision.

The service supervision policy/policies could cover the following:

- Supervision ratios that meet relevant standards and/or licensing requirements
- Active supervision methods
- Preventing injury through supervision
- The design and arrangement of the environment to enhance supervision
- Consistency of supervision
- Staffing rosters and routines to enhance supervision
- Supervision on excursions
- Supervision near water

Open and supportive communication between carers will allow them to remind one another of service practices and seek support and advice when supervising children. Carers who communicate well with their peers will be able to support one another in carrying out the service policies and procedures for effective supervision.



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

- Required carer to child ratios are maintained at all times
- Carers are available to greet and farewell children and families on arrival and departure
- Supervision standards are maintained during carer breaks
- The children's program and experiences are well supported by active supervision by carers
- Children are well supervised during toileting/nappy change routines, meal times and rest periods ■

Further reading

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- Bender, J., Flatter, C H., and Sorrentino, J M. (2000) *Half A Childhood. Quality Programs for Out-of-School Hours*, School-Age NOTES, Nashville, Tennessee.
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