



Adequate and Proper Supervision of Children

Of all the challenges faced by individuals operating or working within child care centers, adequate supervision of young children is likely to be at the top of the list. With so many children now spending significant amounts of time in child care centers each year more focus on adequate and appropriate supervision by child care providers is at the forefront of child advocacy, industry regulatory organizations and risk management professionals. In terms of sound risk management practices, the proper supervision of children within child care settings is a key to preventing a majority of behavior and discipline problems, which often lead to injuries and sometimes death.

In a recent Utica National three year loss analysis for child care centers, lack of or inadequate supervision of children was a contributing factor in a majority of the injuries that young children sustained while spending time there. While having adequate supervision in place does not always guarantee that an incident and injury will not occur it can lessen the risk. Many of the losses reviewed for this most recent analysis occurred within unsupervised or inadequately supervised group activities at child care centers.

The top three loss producing areas associated with children at child care centers that were identified within the analysis include falls (not on playgrounds), improper supervision (*and the actions of children – see note at end), and playground related injuries. Ages of children, their ever changing capabilities and often impulsive actions, along with their varying abilities to help themselves within certain activities makes the challenge of adequate supervision even more daunting at times. In addition, the age, skills and experience of staff members are ancillary contributing factors to injury and loss when it comes to supervision.

The following guidelines should prove helpful as a check of the adequacy of your child care center's supervision efforts and practices. The risk management professionals at Utica National recommend that owners/operators of child care centers share this risk management alert with all staff members and use it as a self evaluation tool.

- Does your child care center currently have a staffing ratio that meets or exceeds your state's requirements? It's important to remember that the higher the staff to child ratio the better particularly when one or more children require direct attention of staff.
- Are there adequate staff-to-child ratios maintained at all hours of operation to include the earliest arrivals, throughout the day and at dismissal times?
- Is there a plan in place for backup supervision should the primary care giver have to leave an activity/room or attend to the direct needs of a child?

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- Have all staff members (as well as volunteers and any substitutes) been instructed in the importance of supervision of the entire group area(s) at all times in addition to providing direct one on one supervision? This should include sleeping and all play areas inside and outside.
- Have all members of management and staff received instruction in emergency preparedness and response to include CPR, first aid, fire evacuation and emergency contacts/notifications?
- Are adequate provisions made for staff to child supervision ratios to be maintained while transporting children? Vehicle drivers should not be expected to provide direct supervision of children they are transporting.
- Are provisions in place to account for all children throughout the day? Are provisions in place to quickly locate children who may have wandered off or hidden from staff members? Has discussion taken place with regard to not leaving children on vehicles unattended for any length of time?
- Are periodic building and grounds evaluations made to determine whether any obstructions to seeing and hearing all children at all times have occurred?
- Have clear and simple safety rules for staff, children and parents been developed and communicated to all? Has thoughtful consideration been given to consequences for staff and child safe behavior violations? Has this been communicated to all staff, children and parents?
- Are parents/persons in parental relation to children required to sign in and encouraged to visit throughout the day?
- Is an inspection program in place to determine periodically whether toys and play equipment are in good condition and safe for children to play with/on?

(*Note that actions of children as a contributing factor to incidents and injuries include but are not limited to impulsive actions of children that result in bumping into one another, striking others with toys, behavior misconduct that results in bullying and/or pushing/shoving others while at play, and risk taking behavior without foresight of potential injury)

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