Parent Aware Tip Sheets
Supervision

Young children require supervision. That means that they need adults to watch them carefully to be sure that they:

- Do not engage in risky behavior
- Do not become victims of illness or other hazards
- Are taking precautions that protect their health, such as hand washing.

o Young children need close supervision because they are not yet able to make good decisions to avoid risks. Children like to test their abilities, which can sometimes result in injuries or harm to others. Also, children are not developmentally able to meet all of their own needs. For example, children need to be supervised during meals because they may not be able to open packages, cut food into small pieces, or practice good hygiene that protects them from spreading illnesses.

o Carefully supervising young children also presents important opportunities. Caregivers learn what children are able to do and what they need support in doing. This is helpful in planning future activities and in sharing progress with families during regular conversations and formal conferences. Supervising also provides a great opportunity to interact with young children and to encourage their learning. While watching children at play and directing them away from hazards, caregivers can pose questions, make suggestions, offer activity ideas, and in other ways expand on what children are discovering in the environment.

What are the basic practices of supervision you need to know?

Adequate supervision of young children relies on a few basic practices. These practices may seem simple, even obvious; however, caregivers must use these techniques every day, throughout the day, and without fail to fully supervise children and protect them from potential harm.

- **Adult-to-child ratio.** Licensing regulations develop the adult-to-child ratios to ensure careful supervision. The ratios for younger children are lower because they need the most supervision. When caregivers attempt to care for more children than ratios allow, the children do not get enough of the caregiver's time and attention to ensure safety. Maintaining the required ratios all day, every day is necessary for adequate supervision to take place.

- **Child count.** It is essential that caregivers know how many children and which children are in their care each moment of the day. This is not as simple or as obvious as it may sound. In many programs children arrive and depart throughout the day. Children may change groups or classrooms during the day. Children change spaces, such as going outdoors or using bathrooms. All of these transitions require that caregivers have a simple, but effective means to track the numbers of children in care at all times.

  Many caregivers take attendance once each day. While a daily attendance activity may be valuable, counting the children just once a day may not capture the dynamic nature of children's arrivals and departures in the program. Instead, caregivers must keep a running tally of the children present in the program. Caregivers should be able to identify at any time the number of children in care and which caregiver is supervising each child.

- **Transitions.** The times when children move from one activity to the next or one space to the next present risks. Children may wander away from the group, they may linger in an area the group is no longer using, or they may simply not understand what is happening next. Caregivers are often busy during these transitions. They are setting up new activities, gathering supplies, or coaxing children who are not ready to move to the next activity. For example, when going outdoors some children are eager, some are reluctant, there are coats to be put on, there is equipment to be gathered. These transition times require extra supervision and vigilance on the part of caregivers. Frequent counts of the children help to ensure that the group is all accounted for in the new space or new activity. Caregivers should always count the number of children before and after transitions and ensure that no children have been lost in the transition.

Arrival at the program and departure from the program also present some special transition challenges. Family members may be in a rush, family members may have information to share, children may be emotional, and caregivers must divide their attention between the family and the other children who need supervision. It is essential that caregivers develop a system to record children's arrival and departure. A sign in and out sheet, for example, clearly identifies which children are in attendance in the program. The process of signing in and out also indicates to the family that a transition in responsibility for the child has taken place.

Risks during arrival and departure time can be minimized by:
- Planning activities that do not require extremely close supervision. For example, avoid water play or teacher-directed activities such as story time during typical arrival and departure hours.
- Stand in an area where you can observe family members arriving and departing and supervise the children at play.
- Become familiar with family members. Do not release a child to anyone you are not familiar with until you have verified identity and permission to pick up the child.
- Establish arrival and departure routines with the children and their families. Pick a place for children and family members to wave goodbye, to place a favorite toy from home, or to check in to the program. Routines help children and families navigate transitions.
- **Environment arrangement.** Supervision is provided by people. However, the following suggestions can help make supervision easier:
- Arrange furniture to minimize 'hiding spaces' or areas in which children cannot be seen or heard. Hiding spaces such as behind shelves, in small nooks or corners can be eliminated by carefully placing furniture.
- Use mirrors to make areas of the environment easier to see. For example, placing a mirror can help make all areas of an L-shaped room visible.
- Avoid using separate rooms for napping or eating if children cannot be seen or heard from the area where the caregiver will be positioned. Children must never be alone in rooms without sight or sound supervision.
- **Proximity.** It is easier to supervise children when they are in the immediate area. Staying close to the children while they play, eat, sleep, and interact makes supervision more effective. Being close to the children makes it easier to see their behavior, to anticipate what will happen next, and to quickly step in to prevent harm. Whenever possible caregivers should position themselves to keep all of the children in view. Caregivers should regularly scan the environment to keep all of the children in sight. Caregivers can also move around the space and regularly patrol the areas of the indoor or outdoor environment that have the greatest risks. For example, caregivers supervising outdoor play should regularly check on swings, climbers, and other equipment where injuries often take place. Close proximity to the following equipment or activities is recommended:

- Water play of any kind
- Children using bathrooms for toileting or hand washing
- Wood working or play with sharp tools
- Play with toys with small pieces
- Interaction with classroom pets
- Outdoor play near swings or climbers
- Outdoor play near water sources, pools or standing water
- Outdoor play near fences or gates.
- **Special situations.** All children require careful supervision every day, throughout the day. But, some situations require extra attention from caregivers and may require additional adults be present to enhance the ratio of adults to children. Some of these events may require special permission from parents. Consult the licensing regulations to be certain the program complies with ratios and permissions required for these events:
- Swimming or other water play
- Field trips
- Transportation of children
- Walks outside of the premises of the program
- Visitors such as storytellers, puppet shows, etc.
- Parties, celebrations, and special events within the program.