

Tip Sheets

Active Supervision: Outside

Active supervision involves watching, listening, interacting, monitoring, and preventing. It also includes recognizing and acting on risks.

Active supervision is successful when caregivers:

- Know each child's abilities.
- Establish clear and simple safety rules.
- Are aware of potential safety hazards.
- Position themselves strategically throughout the environment.
- Scan, count, and circulate the play areas.
- Focus on the positive to teach what is safe.
- Teach children the appropriate use of each piece of equipment (using a slide feet-first).

Keeping Children Safe Outdoors

Outdoor play is active; therefore, children may need a different level of supervision than they do indoors. Keep children safe outside by:

- Always maintaining correct adult-to-child ratios.
- Specially training and designating supervisors in all outdoor play areas.
- Not engaging in prolonged conversations or play with any one child or group of children (or staff) while supervising. Consider assigning some caregivers to supervision and others to facilitate and engage in play and conversation.
- Positioning and assigning staff to watch all children within a specific zone.
- Maintaining close proximity to children who are developing new motor skills and/or may need additional support to ensure their safety.
- Being able to contact another adult for help if needed without leaving the children.

Playground Design and Equipment

It is the caregivers' responsibility to make sure the environment is safe. The playground's design and equipment are an important part of supervision.

- Playground equipment should be arranged in a way that adults can see all children at all times. There should be no blind spots (tunnels around corners, hiding places, enclosed structures...).
- Identify "hot spots" where children often need assistance or where adults might have a hard time seeing children.
- Caregivers should strategically position themselves so they can supervise all areas. They should be spread out, watching, listening, and interacting positively with children.
- Adults should not stand or sit together.

The Outdoor Environment

To help prevent injuries and accidents, carefully inspect the playground, equipment, and other outdoor play areas each day before taking children outside. Look for these issues and correct them before children are permitted to play:

Equipment and Play Surfaces

- Missing or broken parts; stability of handholds
- Protrusion of nuts, bolts, nails, etc.
- Rust and chipping/peeling paint
- Sharp edges, splinters, and rough surfaces
- Visible cracks
- Stability of non-anchored large play equipment such as playhouses
- Wear and deterioration
- Surfaces that are too hot/cold for children to touch safely like hot metal or plastic slides

Environment

- Debris like glass, cigarette butts, litter, etc.
- Animal excrement and other foreign material
- Standing water, ice, or snow
- Natural objects like sharp rocks, stumps, roots, and branches that might cause harm
- Unsafe insects such as anthills, beehives, etc.
- Ditches, holes, wells, traps, cracks
- Broken or worn electrical fixtures or cords
- Exposed power lines or utility equipment

Scan and Count

Constant supervision is the best tool for preventing injury. Active supervision—scanning, predicting, and assessing—is key to keeping children safe. Scan and count using these strategies to ensure that all children are accounted for at all times:

- Visually match names to faces when counting.
- Count repeatedly and during every transition and when leaving/arriving an area. **You should count children approximately every 15 minutes.**
- Be able to state the number of children in your care at all times.
- Record each count on an attendance sheet.
- Note any children who leave the group, such as those who are picked up early.

Responding to Injuries

Injuries can happen. Caregivers must be prepared to respond quickly when a child or adult gets hurt. Make sure the program has a well-stocked first-aid kit that is brought outdoors when children are present and that all caregivers' first-aid and CPR training are current. In the event of an injury:

- Stay calm.
- Respond quickly using what you learned in your first-aid courses. Survey the scene to assess what is wrong and how to respond.

- Decide whether it is safe to approach.
- Assure the child you are there to help.
- Ask questions and examine for injuries.
- Recognize the signs and symptoms that indicate whether the injury is minor, serious, or life-threatening.
- If the injury is **not life threatening**, continue asking questions and monitoring breathing and heart rate.
- Perform any basic first aid that is needed.
- Do not move the child unless their life is at risk.
- Identify whether emergency medical services (EMS) should be contacted. If the child is not breathing, perform CPR as needed.
- Call the child's family.
- Ride along with the child in the ambulance. Bring any relevant documents and contact information you may need with you.
- Report and document the injury using forms provided by your workplace.

Additional Resources

Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards

<https://nrckids.org/CFOC/Database/2.2.0.1>

Head Start | ECLKC: Active Supervision

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices/article/active-supervision>

Virtual Lab School

<https://www.virtuallabschool.org/preschool/safe-environments/lesson-1>

For more information on health and safety, visit <http://www.inclusivechildcare.org/>.

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