

Proper Supervision Leads the Way to Safety

Inadequate and improper supervision are some of the leading root causes of accidents that result in a child's unintentional injury. Whether children are on the playground or inside your facility, proper supervision is the key to providing them with a safe environment.

As Joe L. Frost mentions in his book, *Children and Injuries*, inadequate or improper supervision is a common source of litigation brought against early education teachers, administrators, and programs where unintentional injuries have occurred.

An association often exists between the nature and intensity of supervision required in any situation and factors such as a child's age, developmental abilities, behavioral propensities, type of activity, setting, and the adult's supervisory capabilities.

As *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards* highlights, parents have a contract with caregivers to supervise their children. To be available for supervision or rescue in an emergency, an adult must be able to hear and see the children. Taking that a step further, caregivers should position themselves so they are in close proximity to the children they are supervising.

If a room is too large to maintain close proximity supervision, cordon it off with child-proof gates or reduce the hazards available to a child. For example, stack chairs to prevent a child from climbing on them, or place things out of children's reach.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission's *Handbook for Playground Safety* outlines these key points for playground supervision:

- The quality of supervision depends on the quality of the supervisor's knowledge of safe play.
- Playground supervisors should be aware that not all playground equipment is appropriate for all children.
- If you use off-site playgrounds, supervision involves directing children to equipment appropriate for their age.
- Preschool-age children require more attentive supervision on playgrounds than older children.

You are the best person to evaluate which child requires closer supervision than others. A 5-year-old child may not be developed enough to play in a playground area designated for 5-12 year olds. Move that child to the 2-5 year old play area if necessary.

Finally, it's important to know of any medical or emotional conditions children in your care may be experiencing, and whether they are taking any medication for it. Also find out if the parents have elected to take the child off the medication. This can be critical information toward planning your supervision efforts.