

Child Safe Environments

National Law:

- 165- Offence to inadequately supervise children
- 166- Offence to use inappropriate discipline
- 167- Offence relating to the protection of children from harm and hazards
- 169- Offence relating to staffing arrangements

National Regulations:

- 82- Tobacco, drug and alcohol free environments
- 83- Staff members not to be affected by alcohol or drugs
- 103- Premises, furniture and equipment to be safe, clean and in good repair
- 115- Premises designed to facilitate supervision
- 122- Educators must be working directly with children to be included in ratios
- 123- Educator to child ratios

National Quality Framework:

- 2.2.1 – Supervision
- 3.2 – Use
- 4.1 – Staffing arrangements
- 5.1 – Relationships between educators and children
- 7.1 – Governance

Policy Statement

Child care professionals and families share a common goal to provide positive and safe early childhood environments. It is important that the partnerships with children, families, educators and management determine the priorities of safety in the service environment. When genuine consultation occurs, many ideas can be generated and working solutions implemented.



Goals / What are we going to do?

- Actively supervise while working directly with children.
- Ensure that children's health and safety and wellbeing is protected as reasonably and foreseeably as possible.
- Create a culture of advocacy for children's right to feel safe and be respected.
- Encourage active parent participation and fostering a partnership approach for children's health, safety and wellbeing.
- Complete risk assessment to identify potential emergencies.
- Complete appropriate supervision plans.

Procedures / How will we do this?

Supervision

All children within the service will be supervised in all areas of the service, by being in sight and/or hearing of an educator. So, what is adequate supervision?

1. Adequate supervision means that an educator can respond immediately including when children are distressed or in a hazardous situation.
2. Knowing where children are at all times and monitoring their activities actively and diligently.

Principles of Active Supervision

Supervision is one of the most important key aspects in ensuring children's health and safety is protected at all times. By creating safe physical and social learning environments the Educational Leader and educators can promote children's learning and development. The NQF guidelines:

“Children have the right to be protected from potential hazards and dangers posed by products plants objects, animals and people in the immediate and wider community”.

Active supervision is a combination of listening to and watching children play, being aware of the environment and its potential risks, the weather conditions, the time of day, managing small and large groups of children, and an understanding of child development including theories about how children play.

It is also crucial that educators are aware of the different ages, personalities, behaviours and characteristics of the children in their care. How children interact, communicate and play with one another, is dependent on educators building relationships with children to learn about who they are, how they react in certain situations and discover their interests. These are vital skills to develop as they assist educators to predict children's play patterns, which affects how educators plan and establish environments and coordinate supervision strategies to maximise children's safety and ability to play free from harm or injury.

Setting up the environment

During playground set-up please be aware where children will be and how they will use the equipment for supervision. Grouping equipment together such as easels and water troughs makes supervision much easier.

Scanning the Environment

Scanning is vitally important when supervising children. Educators are required to regularly scan when children are sleeping, especially outdoors and babies in cot rooms and regular checking of older children in outside school care who may not currently be directly supervised.

Educators need to develop a system of regular head counts, marking each child's arrival and departure to ensure that they are fully aware of where each child is *at all times*.

Educators should also have a list of people who are authorised to pick up each child from the service and information regarding those people not allowed to collect a child. Educators need to ensure that this documentation remains confidential.

Positioning of Educators in the Environment

When supervising children educators need to consider how they position themselves both in the outdoor and indoor environment. Educators need to consider;

- Do I have my back to any of the group?
- Am I standing in one spot but in actual fact all the children are over somewhere else?
- Am I near enough to assist a child in an emergency?
- Are new or high-risk experiences being introduced and where will I stand/sit during these experiences?
- Is there a student/volunteer to be considered?

Listening when children play

Listening is also important. Educators need to be aware of children and the noises they make. For example:

- water splashing

- crying
- choking or gasping
- offensive or aggressive language
- silence

Supervising Bathrooms

Bathrooms that are shared with another group should give consideration and discuss with their fellow educators:

- What time each group will transition to the bathrooms? – avoiding overcrowding.
- Which educators will supervise these transitions?
- How many children will be sent to the bathroom at any given time?
- Who and when will bathrooms be restocked with product?
- When will bins be emptied and the bathroom be cleaned and by who?

Transitioning Groups of Children

Supervision during transitions is vitally important and often complex. There may be many things needing to be ready and **organisation** is the key. Educators need to reflect;

- Children should be made aware of an impending transition so they can effectively finish what they are doing.
- When and where are children transitioned throughout the day?
- What can be organised early so children are not left waiting?
- Are there potential risks when transitioning children?
- How can the service develop risk management strategies to eliminate or reduce the potential risks? For example, transitioning children from the parked car or bus to the service's entrance.

Age Groupings

Educators need to be conscious of the age groups being supervised. Observing children's play and anticipating what may happen next will assist children when difficult situations arise and to intervene where there is potential danger to children.

- Children with early signs of illness or atypical behaviours should be monitored closely. This is extremely important when supervising children with known medical conditions.
- Keep children's developmental records up to date so that as educators you are aware of a child's capabilities and the appropriate level of challenge that can be made to the playground to enhance their development.

Rosters

Careful planning of rosters is vital in ensuring that educators are always able to respond to children. The service will always do our very best to accommodate changes to the roster to meet the needs of educators

however ratio's and children's safety will be the priority.

Ratios

Infants	birth to 24 months 1:4
Toddlers	24-36 months 1:5
Kindergarten	36 months – Prep 1:11
Prep	Prep+ 1:15

Ratios can be calculated across the service (not by individual rooms). This concept gives providers the flexibility to respond to the needs of children. So, if you had a mixed age group of children, maintaining the ratio for each age range of children does not mean the educator to child ratio for the youngest age range must be applied to all children in an older age range. An educator who is caring for one age range of children can also be counted against another age range of children (but be in a different room), as long as the ratio for each age range is maintained and adequate supervision is maintained at all times.

This practice in our industry is called “Under Roof Ratio – I will call it out for what it is. It is very bad policy making by the Australian Government-although I add that was not their intention. But it is a regulation that is exploited by many in our industry to save on their wage costs.

It causes great stress to educators and ultimately children. The service does not use this practice and in each room we ensure the ratio for that age group is maintained at all times regardless of what is occurring elsewhere in the building.



Educators under the age of 18 years.

Educators under 18 will not work alone at the service. An educator who is under the age of 18 years will be adequately supervised during their day. The service considers supervising an educator under 18 as having a mentor who offers support, advice and information and emotional support. The service employment handbook outlines numerous ways to mentor and support new employees.

Video Surveillance

The service has camera systems as a way of primarily protecting our educators from accusations against educators. This surveillance will never be provided to any

third party without being subpoenaed by a court. This is to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all children in the footage. At no times will the service live stream or video-conference unless for educational purposes and only then with every parents consent. Should any government department require the footage then it will be viewed on the service premises.

Visitors

A visitor log will record all visitors that have attended the service. The service will take all reasonable steps to ensure children are not left alone with visitors at the service. Extra curricula show or activities will be supervised by a staff member and where possible the educator will be actively engaged with the program.

Risk Assessments

All members of our educational team will contribute to our supervision risk assessments and make professional judgements to determine the approach to supervision. These risk assessments will determine the level of supervision that is required in particular situations. For example, an educator may recognise that a particular activity that involves some risk, such as carpentry, water play, or cooking requires close supervision.

Alternatively, if the children are participating in low risk activities the educator can retain greater conversations with individual children or in fact have no conversations and stay out of play unless required. This method of supervision requires a combination of scanning, listening and being present, really knowing what is happening.

Car Seating

Appropriate car seating must be used at all times when transporting children. Car seating will not be purchased second hand. Child restraints that are compliant with this new Standard (AS/NZS1754:2010) will include shoulder height markers to ensure appropriate use of the seat. The new standard for child restraints will no longer rely on the child's weight, making it easier to ensure that the appropriate restraint is being used.

Once the child's shoulders reach the seat height limit of the restraint, the child should move up to the next type of restraint where his or her shoulders are in line with or above the lowest marker.

Play Equipment

Resources in all areas should be kept plentiful and stored well for easy access. They should be attractive and in good repair. New items will be purchased periodically. A stimulating program requires creativity of ideas from educators and children. The program should try to look at familiar activities in new ways e.g., vary the time, presentation, location or add new pieces of equipment.

Animals and Domestic Pets

Within the service there may be animals that are permanently on site or occasions when pets are invited or perhaps attend your service uninvited. During these times, it is important to quickly think about the risks to yourself and the children and take appropriate action.

Permanent Pets: If permanent animals are on site a separate risk assessment will be kept specifically for these animals. The following practices will be followed:

- Animals will be fenced in appropriate housing at all times.
- Animals will be fed appropriate feed and water to ensure their health.
- Animals will be checked during the morning and the afternoon, opening /closing procedures.
- Children will follow hand washing procedures after tending to the animals.
- Parents to be informed of animals upon enrolment.
- Children will be educated on the care and wellbeing of the animals.
- Should any animal look unwell the vet will be called.
- Animals will be wormed and vaccinated as per the Vet instructions.
- Animal pens are kept clean.

Invited Pets: Such as family pets, cats, dogs, birds, guinea pigs all provide a wealth of opportunities for learning with the service however consideration still needs to be given to how long the animal will stay, where it will reside at the service, who will be responsible for its primary care and the clean-up of faeces.

Uninvited Pets: Such as spiders, snakes, injured animals or bats may also generate lots of discussion and learning however greater caution is required. Opening and closing checks are vital to identifying animals that may need to be removed before the children begin their day. At all times the children's safety is paramount. Educators need to discuss with children that spiders / snakes / injured animals should be handled by an adult.

Poisonous Plants

There are a wide range of garden plants that are considered harmful when consumed. Small children are often at greater risk from coloured berries, petals and leaves that look succulent. Children are naturally inquisitive about such things and while we encourage children to explore their environment, we ensure their safety.

It must never be assumed that because a plant or seed is being eaten by wildlife that it is non-poisonous.

Children should be discouraged from putting leaves, stems, seeds, nuts or berries into their mouths.

Tobacco, Drug and Alcohol Free Environment

A smoke free environment strategy is vital because children model adult behaviour. Children are prone to the harmful effects of environmental tobacco smoke because their lungs and body weight are small, so the dangerous substances in smoke are more harmful.

Educators, staff, parents or volunteers must not consume alcohol or drugs or smoke in any area utilised by the service.

Educators who require prescription medication should not be discriminated against if the medication does not affect the person's capacity to provide education and care to children. Educators are required to leave their medication in the office or their locker. No medication should be left in a room storeroom where there is potential for a child to find.

Employees who wish to smoke during work hours may do so outside the workplace and in their scheduled lunch break or approved breaks.

Links to Theory

So, what Early Childhood theories help support this policy?

There is considerable brain research that confirms for Early Childhood practitioners that safe and secure learning environments are essential for children's brain development. The AEDC (Australian Early Development Census) cites the following;

"Stress is a feature of the normal development of positive and adaptive coping. Everyday stress responses of a moderate and brief nature can result in mild increases of hormone levels (cortisol) and short-lived increases in heart rate. These kinds of 'tolerable' stress responses help in the development of adaptive coping when buffered by stable and supportive relationships and are an important part of healthy development.

Excessive or long-lasting stress is known as 'toxic stress' and can have a negative impact on brain development. Examples of toxic stress include: physical or sexual abuse, neglect or lack of affection, parental mental illness, family violence, poverty, and lack of adequate housing. Ongoing stress factors that are not buffered by caring and positive relationships disrupt brain architecture leading to a lower threshold of activation of the stress management system, which in turn can lead to life-long problems in learning, behaviour, and both physical and mental health.

Although manageable levels of stress are normal and growth-promoting, toxic stress in the early

years can damage brain development. It is in situations where ongoing stress is likely, that intervening as early as possible is critical to achieving the best possible outcomes for the child. Caring and positive relationships are essential to ensure stress levels promote resilience for babies and children”.

Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics

In relation to the children, I will:

“Create and maintain safe, healthy, inclusive environments that support children’s agency and enhance their learning”

In relation to the colleagues, I will:

“Implement strategies that support and mentor colleagues to make positive contributions to the profession”

National Quality Framework – Children’s health and safety

2.2.1. At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard.

National Quality Framework – Physical environment

3.2. The service environment is inclusive, promotes competence and supports exploration and play-based learning.

National Quality Framework – Staffing arrangements

4.1. Staffing arrangements enhance children’s learning and development.

National Quality Framework – Relationships with children

5.1. Respectful and equitable relationships are maintained with each child.

National Quality Framework – Governance and Leadership

7.1. Governance supports the operation of a quality service.

Culturally Valued Perspectives

The service vision is to ensure children from all cultures are reflected in our policies and procedures. Children’s safety is always at the forefront of everything we do regardless of a child’s heritage.

Despite numerous legal and policy frameworks protecting the cultural rights of Indigenous children, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander children in out-of-home care is almost ten times that of other children, and continues to grow.

Reflective questions about this policy!

What is working well what could we improve?

How do you ensure that you are aware of where children are at all times?

How do we ensure that we complete the daily safety checks so we can guarantee that equipment and the building is safe and in good repair?

How do you take into consideration the age of the children when supervising?

How can you ensure that educators are allocated to certain areas to make sure that all of the environment is being supervised?

What are some ways that you can ensure that you observe situations and offer assistance or ideas when needed, but still allow children opportunities to explore and solve problems by themselves or with others?

Take some photos of children playing and just notice where they are playing! Ask yourself about equity. Are boys dominating the blocks...girls in home corner?

When answering the reflective questions did you have areas identified for improvement:

If change is required:

- Discuss any proposed changes to supervision, practices or documentation.
- Obtain agreement with others about how issues might be addressed.

To implement the changes effectively:

- Trial the changes
- Seek feedback and consult.

Review of change is an important step:

- Evaluate whether the changes have improved practice or whether other strategies or plans need to be trialed and implemented.

Document in your QIP.....

Roles and Responsibilities in providing child safe environments.

Approved Provider, Area Manager’s and Director

- Ensure that obligations under the *Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations* are met.
- Ensure that the *Child Safe Environment Policy* is implemented, the appropriate risk assessments and action plans are completed

and all identified actions are taken to minimize the risks to children's health and safety.

- Provide an environment that is free from the use of tobacco, illicit drugs and alcohol and ensure no educators are affected by drugs and alcohol so as to impair their capacity to supervise or provide education and care to children in the service.
- Take reasonable steps to ensure that educators, staff and volunteers follow the policies and procedures.
- Ensure copies of policies and procedures are readily accessible to nominated supervisors, educators, staff and volunteers and are available for inspection.
- Notify families 14 days before changing the policy and procedures if the changes affect;
 - Fees and or the collection of fees
 - Significantly impact the service education and care of children,
 - Significantly impact the family's ability to utilize the service.
- Complete centre visit reports when attending the service.

Persons in day to day charge

- Implement the Child Safe Environment policy and ensure that any plans developed from risk assessments are in place for individual children and are carried out.
- Meeting staff to child ratios to ensure adequate supervision.
- Ensure all educators have access to a copy of the Child Safe Environments policy.
- When required, work collaboratively with appropriate services and professionals to support children's access, inclusion and participation in the program.
- Ensure the visitor's record is maintained.
- Prepare meetings that involve identifying risks and planning for child safe environments.

Educators

- Implement the Child Safe Environment policy and ensure that any plans developed from risk assessments are in place for individual children and are carried out.
- Know the individual needs and action plans for children.
- Monitor and maintain staff ratio's to ensure adequate supervision.
- Provide an environment that is free from tobacco, illicit drugs and alcohol.
- Ensure that any plants that are brought to the service are not poisonous to children.
- Ask visitors to sign the visitor's record.

- Attend educator meetings and contribute to risk assessments that affect your working environment.

Families

- Become familiar with key aspects of the Child Safe Environments outlined in the service parent handbook.
- Complete and sign the service orientation form.
- Ensure that when addressing concerns or contributing to the service policy that the service Code of Conduct be followed.
- Do not send your child to the centre with items that may cause a risk to your child or others.

Sources and Further Reading

Active Supervision Ensuring Safety and Promoting Learning. Feb 2018 *Information Sheet*
<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/media/22946>

Australian Human rights Commission –
<http://www.humanrights.gov.au>

Department of Transport and main roads
<http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/childrestraints>

Frith, J., Kambouris, N., & O'Grady, O. (2003). *Health & Safety in Children's Services: Model Policies and Practices* (2nd ed.). NSW: School of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of New South Wales.

Guide to the National Quality Framework –
<https://acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about/guide>

Kidsafe Queensland - <https://kidsafeqld.com.au>

[The Cancer Council](#) QLD. (2008). *Passive Smoking*
[UNICEF](#) (n.d.). *Fact sheet: A summary of the Rights Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

