

Supporting Children's Safety through Professional Supervision

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One in three concerns the College receives related to early childhood educators involves unsupervised children. Yet, the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* requires that RECEs “provide safe and appropriate supervision of children based on age, development and environment.”

So why is professional supervision so challenging? Professional supervision of children is a dynamic and multi-faceted process. It involves knowledge, skills, practices, communication with others and the need to identify and respond to high risk situations. RECEs can help meet this challenge and reduce the risk of unattended children by reflecting on risks and employing professional supervision strategies.

Early childhood educators agree the following factors increase the risk of children wandering away, being left behind or being injured while unsupervised:

1. transition periods
2. lack of or poor communications
3. unattended hazards in the physical environment

Transition Periods: During transition times when RECEs are focussed on guiding children from one activity to another; or from one environment to another, children can more easily become separated from the group. When children are on the move, conducting headcounts before and after transitioning may seem basic, but it is fundamental to reducing the risk of a missing child. Breaking into small groups with fewer children to watch during transition activities also ensures transitions are supportive, safer and easier to manage.



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Lack of/Poor Communication: Risks during transitions are heightened when colleagues assume there are sufficient processes in place; or when they think their colleagues have “got it covered”. Roles and responsibilities can become blurred when RECEs take on supervising a new group of children that joins their own group (e.g., end of a day) or when one child requires individual support in the midst of a group transition.

RECEs can increase communication with colleagues before, during and after transitions. Clearly stating what they are doing and for whom they are responsible, ensures there are no misunderstandings or assumptions.

Unattended Hazards: Having an overall awareness of indoor and outdoor surroundings is another strategy. Children can wander off through a broken gate, an unlocked door or a fence hole in the physical environment.

Beyond issues with the physical environment, unsafe situations can present themselves in other ways (e.g., a small space for a child to hide). Checking entrances and exits from all angles and moving furniture or equipment to enhance supervision are points to consider for safe and appropriate supervision of children.

Finally, one of the best strategies for professional supervision is to know the children in your practice. What are their temperaments, interests and needs? What are the challenges and stressors for individual children in your group? Supportive, responsive relationships with children and effective communication and collaboration with colleagues are essential to help identify changes or potential risks in the learning environment which may require additional attention or supervision.