

Supervision in child care

Child Care Licensing is a division of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). It regulates and monitors child care operations in Texas. For more information about child care licensing and its services, visit www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_care.

Licensed child care centers and homes have nearly 1,100 standards related to children's health and safety. Often, when an accident or severe incident occurs at a program, it can be traced back to issues related to supervision.

Appropriate supervision is a learned and practiced skill. It demands much more than simply having an adult body in the classroom and on the playground. Texas Minimum Standards define *supervision* as the following:

§746.1205. What does Licensing mean by supervise children at all times ?

Supervising children at all times means that the assigned caregiver is accountable for each child's care. This includes responsibility for the ongoing activity of each child, appropriate visual and/or auditory awareness, physical proximity, and knowledge of activity requirements and each child's needs. The caregiver must intervene when necessary to ensure children's safety.

In deciding how closely to supervise children, always take into account:

- ages of the children;
- (children's) individual differences and abilities;
- indoor and outdoor layout of the child-care center; and
- neighborhood circumstances, hazards, and risks.

This definition for supervising a group of young children is a learned and practiced skill (learned pre-service and over time) that requires attention, responsiveness, and consistency. Supervision is an ongoing and active process that results in a safe environment and safe children. All too often, the times when children need the highest level of supervision, we tend to become a bit lax.

For example, *Caring for Our Children 3* (<http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/2.2.0.1>) states that children playing outside need more supervision

rather than less. Too often, however, teachers think of outdoor play as free time. As such, the level of active supervision decreases rather than increases.

Another time that Licensing sees a decrease in active supervision is during naptime—a period when it is imperative to ensure that all children are actively supervised. For example, during naptime children could find an opportunity for behavioral missteps (like ingesting berries found growing near the playground fence). Or a child may have an urgent need to use the toilet or simply need the reassurance of a responsive adult after a bad dream. A practice of active supervision during naptime prepares adults to effectively respond to emergencies like a child's seizure or a blaring fire alarm.

The words *supervise* and *supervision* can be found 111 times in standards. The following are a few key areas where supervision is required in the Minimum Standards—and is often lacking:

- when children are serving meals family-style,
- while children use toothpaste and brush teeth,
- when children use hand sanitizer,
- when a child is ill and awaiting parent pickup, and
- when a child is temporarily removed from the group as in a brief time-out.

Note that infants must be supervised at all times, including when they are asleep.

Minimum Standards require caregivers to meet §746.1203(4), which includes supervising all children at all times. Unfortunately, in 2016, this standard was cited 1,284 times and was the second most cited deficiency in program operation.

§746.1203. What additional responsibilities do my caregivers have?

In addition to the responsibilities for employees specified in this division, caregivers must:

- (1) Know and comply with the minimum standards for child-care centers;

- (2) Know which children they are responsible for;
- (3) Know each child's name and have information showing each child's age;
- (4) Supervise all children at all times (as specified in §746.1205);
- (5) Ensure the children are not out of control; and
- (6) Be free from activities not directly involving the teaching, care, and supervision of children, such as:
 - (A) Administrative and clerical duties that take the caregiver's attention away from the children;
 - (B) Meal preparation, except when 12 or fewer children are in care;
 - (C) Janitorial duties; and
 - (D) Personal use of electronic devices, such as cell phones, MP3 players, tablets, and video games.

Recently, the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC), published resources on active supervision. The center's website, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices/article/active-supervision>, is filled with resources on active supervision, including training materials.

The center identifies six core areas of active supervision that can provide for a strong, healthy and safe program for your children. Consider the following components:

1. *Set up the environment:* Consider the setup of the classroom. Can you observe the children from all areas of the classroom? Does the setup include low shelving and equipment so you can observe the children and engage with them as well?
2. *Position staff:* Do you plan ahead and anticipate problems so that you are positioned to supervise and intervene as necessary? Are you positioned during naptimes, bathroom routines, mealtimes, and active outside play so that you can observe all children for safety?
3. *Scan and count:* Do you always know how many children are present in your group? Constantly scanning and counting children becomes second nature in providing active supervision. During hectic transition times, such as drop-off, pick-up, and moving from playground to classroom, do you have a solid system in place to accurately account for all of your children?
4. *Listen:* Supervision that involves hearing what is happening in the classroom can help you detect

- conversation or concerns that require intervention. What about when the group of children or classroom becomes too quiet?
5. *Anticipate children's behavior:* Knowing your children is imperative to anticipate behavior. Do you have children that like to hide, run from the group in transitions, put items in their mouths, wander away from the group, and sleep on the bus? Knowing your children as individuals can help you anticipate situations to ensure children are safe in the classroom and during transitions.
6. *Engage and redirect:* As you supervise the children, you know how they respond with different tasks, relationships, and transitions. This allows you to engage when a child needs some adult assistance or to redirect the child to appropriate choices or behavior.

Child Care Licensing wants you to have a school year free from injury and incidents. Take the time to evaluate whether your classroom is practicing active supervision, where your strengths and weaknesses lie, and how to improve your program's supervision practices.

Start the year off on the right foot with staff trainings for active supervision. This can be training where teams of teachers visit each other's classrooms and identify supervision strengths and weaknesses. Assist each other with the classroom setup, discuss the best options for teacher placement in the room during naptimes, small group times, mealtimes, and time on the playground. Remember, practice is an ongoing activity. Repeat and refine supervision tactics using the six active supervision core areas every day throughout the year.

Need more help?

Remember to reach out to your local licensing office when you need additional licensing assistance:

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. April 15, 2017. Retrieved July 25, 2017 from the minimum standards section, www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Child_Care_Standards_and_Regulations/default.asp or local licensing offices, www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Local_Child_Care_Licensing_Offices/default.asp.

If you need additional resources, check these: Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center. n.d. Retrieved July 25, 2017 from the section on Safety

Practices: 1) Active Supervision, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices/article/active-supervision>, and 2) Keeping Children Safe Using Active Supervision, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices/article/keep-children-safe-using-active-supervision>. ■