

SUPERVISING CHILDREN

Guide to Appropriate Supervision in Family Child Care Homes

Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Early Childhood Development
Office of Child Care

Resource Guide

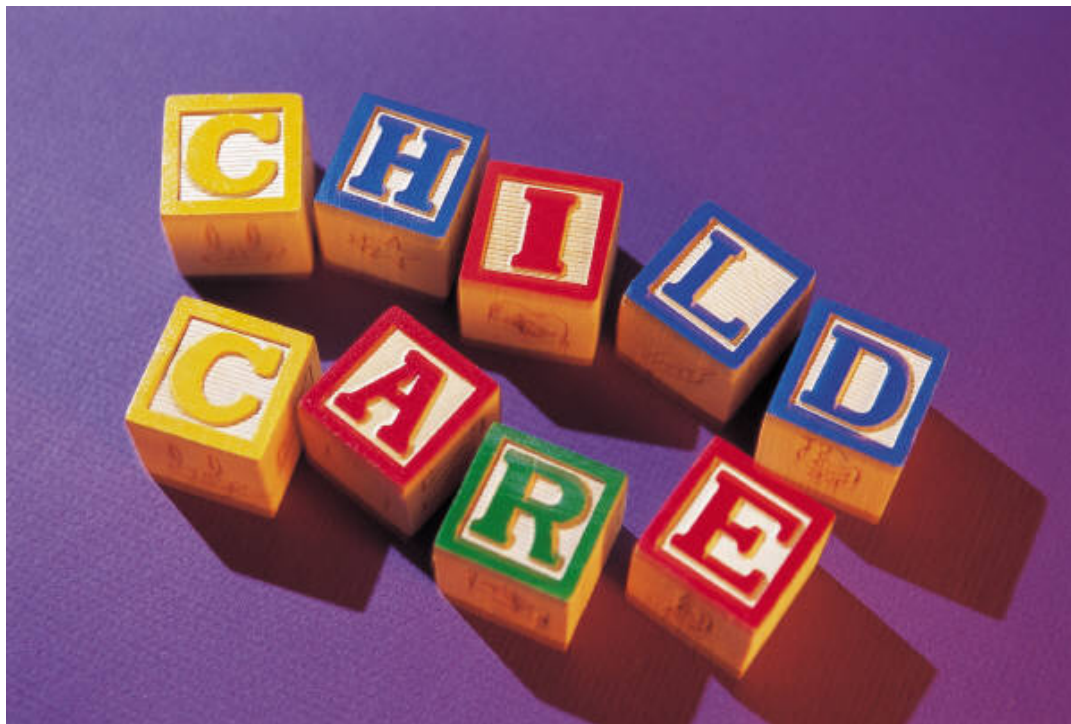


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Introduction

The basic purpose of all child care licensing regulations is to help protect children in care. Perhaps the single most important regulation is the one that addresses child supervision. A clear understanding of supervision will make it easier for you to keep children safe.

Children are naturally active and inquisitive. They also tend to be impulsive, careless, and risk-taking. It takes only a moment for a child to get into a situation that may easily result in an accident or injury to self or others.

You are a professional caregiver – you are in business as a registered family child care provider. When you take care of other people’s children, you are expected to be even more protective of these children than you might be of your own.

The families you serve are your customers – parents pay you to take good care of their children and to make sure that no harm comes to them. Your number one responsibility is to provide safe, healthy, nurturing and responsive settings for children.

This guide will address some of the most common misunderstandings about the supervision requirements. If after reading it you have questions, please call your licensing specialist for additional assistance.

What is Supervision?

Supervision is the act of directing and watching over the performance and activities of the children in your care.

When a child is in attendance, the individual responsible for supervising the child shall at all time:

- (1) Be alert and responsive;
- (2) Know where the child is;
- (3) Be able to see or hear the child;
- (4) Be near enough to the child to render immediate assistance;
and
- (5) Provide supervision appropriate to the individual age, needs, capabilities, activities, and location of the child.

Simply being within sight or sound does not mean you are providing adequate supervision. You must also be near enough to the child to provide immediate assistance when needed. Children's play may be physically active, but it is up to you to be sure that it doesn't become unsafe. Your guidance of children's behavior and active intervention is an important part of supervision.

Just exactly how near is "near enough"? The answer to that depends on how old the child is, whether the child has any special needs, where the child is and what he or she is doing at the moment, and whether there are any nearby environmental factors (for example, a swimming pool, traffic, machinery or other hazards) that may pose a risk to the child.

What is important is where the children are in relation to where you are. When a child needs help, it doesn't matter if you can see or hear the child if you cannot get to the child immediately. **Supervision requires much more than simply seeing or hearing the child.** Some children require more supervision than others, and you need to know each child.

For example, it may be acceptable to see or hear a responsible eight year old child playing ball in the backyard, but it may not be appropriate to allow an immature eight year old to play alone in the backyard even if you can see or hear the child.

Supervision of Children in Family Child Care

Children may never be left alone in your Family Child Care home. For example, you may not leave children:

- While you go to a bus stop with other children.
- While you go outside with other children in care.
- While you go to an outside mailbox, or to do yard work.

Reminder: Never leave children alone. No one may care for child care children without approval from the Office of Child Care.

Who May Supervise Family Child Care Children?

- Providers
- Approved Substitutes

Approved Substitutes must:

- Be at least 18 years of old
 - Submit a completed substitute form to OCC
 - Complete a criminal background check if being paid
 - Be approved by OCC
 - Be familiar with the regulations and procedures
- Approved Additional Adults

Reminder: Children must never be left in the care of unapproved friends or relatives. It is a good idea to have more than one approved substitute on record with OCC to assist in unforeseen emergencies.

Multi-Level Supervision

Supervision is more difficult to maintain when multi-level homes are involved. For example when:

- The bathroom is on a different level – all awake children under 6 must go with you when one of them or you need to use the bathroom.
- The napping is on a different level – awake children under 6 must go with you to make the visual checks.
- The kitchen is on a different level – children must go with you for meal and snack preparation. Plan to have appropriate space and activities for the children while you are in the kitchen.
- The entrance is on a different level – children under 6 must accompany you when you have arrivals and departures.

Questions to consider:

- Will you be able to take the infants and pre-school children with you to check on the school-aged children at least every 15 minutes?
- Are the parents aware that the school-aged children may be unattended on a different level of the home?
- Can you be sure that school-aged children, when out of your sight and on a different level of the home, won't engage in any inappropriate activities?

Reminder: Audio and video monitors are not to be used in place of your visual checks and natural hearing.

Capacity Consideration

The more children you care for, the more difficult it is to provide appropriate supervision. Several factors should be considered in determining the number and ages of children you will enroll. In planning your program, think about the following:

- How will you meet the needs and schedules of all the children in your care on a daily basis?
- How will you balance the needs of your family, your children and your daycare children?
- How will you handle emergencies? For example, what would you do if your child suddenly becomes ill?

Supervision of Children Under Age 6

Inside Activities – You must be within sight or sound of the children and they must be on the same level of your home as you are at all times. You may:

- Not go to another level of the home at any time and leave any awake children under 6 years of age on a different level of the home, not even to answer the door.
- Not be far enough away from the children at any time that you cannot get to them immediately to tend to their needs.
- Not engage in any activity that will limit your ability to hear or respond to the children immediately (such as showering, vacuuming, using a hair dryer, etc.).
- Not go outside for any reason and leave children in care.

Outside Activities

Whenever children under 6 are outside of the home, you must be with them at all times. Injuries, drowning, or children wandering off are examples of risks that can be prevented if you constantly keep your eyes on the children. This means that you should not engage in any distracting activity while watching children.

Supervision of Children Ages 6 and Older

Inside Activities – Children 6 years and older may be on another level of your home without you if you can see or hear them and:

- You check them often enough (at least every 15 minutes) to ensure their health, safety, and welfare.
- They have demonstrated that they can follow directions and behave appropriately.
- You have discussed the arrangement with their parents and they approve.
- The level of the home is approved and meets the fire code for child care.

Outside Activities – Children 6 years and older may be outside without you if:

- You can see or hear them at all times.
- You remain alert and responsive.
- You are close enough to render immediate assistance.
- You check them often enough (at least every 15 minutes) to ensure their health, safety, and welfare.

- You have discussed the arrangement with their parents and they approve.
- They have demonstrated that they can follow directions and behave appropriately.
- They are not in or around a pool or body of water.

Please be mindful that children of this age may have a curiosity regarding their bodies and sexual play. They can be secretive and resourceful and may take advantage of unsupervised moments to explore. You must continue to evaluate the individual needs of each child beyond their age to provide appropriate supervision as needed.

Supervision of Sleeping Children – Rest Periods

- You must be awake, alert, and in the residence.
- You must maintain supervision throughout rest periods. You must make visual checks of sleeping children often enough to ensure their health, safety, and welfare.
- Monitoring devices are not used as a substitute for supervision.
- Gates to stairways must be properly secured.

Infants 12 months and Younger

- Shall be actively observed at least every 15 minutes to check for breathing, safety, and physical comfort.
- Shall be placed for sleep on the child's back unless you have a note from the child's physician.

Supervision During Mealtime

- It is best practice to hold a baby under 9 months for bottle-feeding.
- Always use the safety strap for a child seated in a high chair.
- Never leave a child with food unattended.
- The preparation and serving of food must be appropriate for the age of the child to avoid choking.

Reminder: Young children are at risk of choking on small, round foods such as hotdogs, candies, nuts of any type, sunflower seeds, watermelon with seeds, grapes, cherries with pits, raw carrots, raw peas, raw celery, popcorn, and hard candy.

- Don't give a child under age 4 any hard, smooth foods that can partially or completely block the windpipe.
- Some soft foods can also cause choking because they are the right shape for blocking a child's windpipe. These foods, including hotdogs, sausages, grapes, and caramels can be served if they are chopped into small pieces.
- Spoonfuls of peanut butter and chewing gum should also be regarded as potential choking hazards.

Off-premises Play Area Supervision – All ages

- You must supervise children to, from, and at off-premises play areas such as swimming facilities and parks.
- When walking with children outdoors, you must exercise reasonable care to protect children from potential hazards such as traffic, railroad tracks, roaming animals or violent situations.
- You should inspect the play area upon arrival to make sure it's safe for the children.

Activities Outside of the Home Supervised by Others

You may permit a child to participate in supervised activities outside of the home without you if:

- You have written permission from the child's parent for the child's participation.
- Responsibility for the child's whereabouts and supervision is clearly assigned throughout the period of care.

For example, if you have written permission from the parent, you may transport a child to a preschool program or soccer practice where the teacher or coach assumes responsibility for the child.

Transportation

Vehicle Supervision

- Always Buckle Children in the appropriate seat belt/safety seat as required by Maryland law.
- Before starting the vehicle check to see that all children are present and properly secured.

Children may never be left unattended in a vehicle:

- While you run into a store, or handle any type of business.
- While you go to pay for gas, buy something inside, etc.

Reminder: Don't leave children alone in a vehicle at any time for any reason.

Supervision of Children Traveling Between School and Child Care

- **Children Using School Bus Transportation**

There must be a definite plan approved by you and the parent for a child's transportation between child care and school. Your contract with the parent should state what the arrangement and responsibilities are for the transportation of a child between school and child care. The provider should notify parents and the school if a child fails to arrive timely from the school to the child care facility. Children are your responsibility until they get on the bus in the morning and after they get off the bus in the afternoon.

- **Children Walking to and From School**

A child under six years of age must be supervised by an adult while walking to and from the bus stop, while waiting for the bus, or while walking to and from school. However, a child under age six may be permitted to travel to and from school without adult supervision if the child is in the first or higher grade; the child will turn six by the end of December of the same calendar year; and following an assessment of the child's readiness, you and the parent agree that the child can travel safely without adult supervision.

A child six years of age or older may travel to and from school alone. However, you and the parent must assess the readiness of the child to travel back and forth to school without supervision. The assessment must be documented in an agreement that has the parent's statement of permission allowing the child to walk to and from school, times of arrival and departure to and from the child care home, and the child's route. The agreement must be on file in the child care home.

Field Trips

- Field trips should be for the benefit of all the children in your care. For example, taking an infant with school-aged children on a trip geared for older children is not appropriate care for infants.
- Routinely running errands is not an appropriate activity when children are in your care.

Water Safety

Supervision is extremely difficult to maintain with regard to water activities. Contact your licensing specialist for technical assistance before taking children wading or swimming.

Issues Affecting Supervision

Supervision of Children During Unannounced Inspections by OCC

- Substitutes can be used during inspections to assist with supervision. The use of the substitute while you are in the home does not count towards the 20-day limit.
- Be prepared for inspections by having all of your paper work readily available. It would be helpful to have all your records kept in the child care area to avoid leaving children unsupervised.
- The Licensing Specialist is not allowed to supervise children during the inspection.
- If an unapproved area must be inspected, you and the children may accompany the licensing specialist unless advised differently.

Phones, Visitors, and Family

- Find an effective way to screen your calls to minimize distractions when answering the phone during child care hours.
- Minimize visitors during child care hours to make sure children are supervised appropriately.
- Have a plan for how you will interact with your family and meet their needs while caring for child care children. Contact your Licensing Specialist if you need assistance in this area.

Reminder: When attending to your own personal needs or engaged in another business, you must have a plan to not leave children in your care unsupervised.

Inappropriate Requests from Parents

- Parents cannot give you permission to violate the regulations.
- Do not allow parents to jeopardize the welfare and safety of the children in your care. Remember this is your professional business. If in doubt, contact your Licensing Specialist.

Handling Emergencies

- Contact the local authorities immediately for emergency situations beyond your control.
- As a good practice, arrange to have more than one approved substitute as a back up for emergencies.

Supervision Scenarios

1. Kyree (age 2 1/2) is potty trained. The child care home has the bathroom on the upper level of the home. The children are playing puzzles with you downstairs. Kyree has to go to the bathroom. How is this handled?
2. It is 4:00 p.m. Karee (5), Leah (7), and Matthew (8) are eager to go outside. Angel (7 months) is sleeping in the crib by the door. What do you do and why?
3. The bus stop for your street is 3 houses away (about 300 feet). Bryan (8), Rodney (6), and Renee (5) get back from school at 3:45 p.m. It is raining. Jayden (2) just finished snack and Joshua (2 months) is asleep. It is 3:35 p.m. What do you do and why?

Answers:

1. You must go upstairs with Kyree. If the children downstairs are under 6, they must definitely go upstairs with you. Children who are 6 or older may stay downstairs if:
 - they will be within hearing range,
 - you will be able to check on them within 15 minutes,
 - they are likely to follow the rules, and
 - their parents know they will be on a separate floor from the provider.
2. You cannot go outside and leave the baby alone inside. You may have the three older children wait until Angel wakes up and take the whole group out together. You may allow Leah, and Matthew to go out alone if you follow supervision guidelines, but this would not be recommended if it would cause distress to Karee.
3. This is a good example of the difficulty faced by a provider dealing with a broad age range of children. You must arrange for Jayden and Joshua to accompany you to the bus stop.