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SUPERVISION GUIDELINES FOR PLAYGROUNDS

Playground injuries are the leading cause of injuries to students 5 - 14 in the school environment. It is estimated that more than 40 percent of playground injuries are related to inadequate supervision. Supervision plans should be essential components of any school or child care centers' policies and risk management plans.

The development of a supervision plan takes careful consideration. Before a plan is established, it is important to listen to various perspectives, consider many points of view, observe the children playing and evaluate the site. After weighing all the factors, a comprehensive plan can be tailored for that particular location. Remember, taking time for preliminary discussions and contemplation will build a more complete plan and save effort in the long run.

The following steps have been created to help schools and child care centers create a supervision plan. It is highly recommended that the steps be followed in order.

Three Steps to Creating a Playground Supervision Plan

1. Create a committee with members representing various points of view.

Members should represent a mixture of:

- administrators (superintendent, principal, director)
- staff (teachers of all age levels, special educator, physical educator, teaching associates, secretary, nurse, custodian and others)
- children
- parents
- board members

Committee appointments should include:

- a chairperson to run the meetings
- a secretary to keep good notes, including topics discussed, decisions made and names of persons attending meetings

2. Research policy information.

Determine what district policies may already be in place. Policies about supervision should be district wide or company consistent. A school or a site can choose to make policies that are more stringent and beyond the district policies. But they must, at the very minimum, follow what has been set by the district or company. Topics to consider:

- **Ratio of children to adults.** There is no magic number for the ratio of children to adults, but a school or child care center should be consistent, or even more stringent, with others in the district or company. Some suggest that the ratio should be the same as an indoor classroom. For example, if there is one adult to 20 children inside, the same ratio should be applied outside.
- **Training for adults.** Adults should be trained annually to supervise the playground setting – both the children and the equipment. Training topics include:
 - 1) **Philosophy of supervision.** The school or child care center must choose a philosophy of supervising children at the site. There are many options to choose from, including facilitator, direct teaching and command. The supervisors must be proactive in maintaining the set philosophy. Placement and movement of supervisors among children is crucial in order for the children to know that the adults are there and available.
 - 2) **Conflict resolution.** It is recommended that supervisors, or other adults or designated children on the playground, have conflict resolution training to help deter potential problems.
 - 3) **Inspection.** Supervisors should be able to inspect basic aspects of playground safety. Supervisors do not need to be certified playground inspectors, but on a daily basis should check to see that: equipment is anchored well into the ground; the equipment has no cracks; the ground cover is in place under the equipment; and the ground cover is free from debris. If problems are found, they should be reported in writing and submitted to the administrator. Someone should be assigned to inspect the equipment in more detail on a regular basis. And if a piece becomes disabled, it should be cordoned off so children cannot use it until it is repaired. See the Playground Inspection Guide for details.
 - 4) **Maintenance.** Supervisors should be able to do minimal maintenance such as putting the ground cover back in place and supervising children to do the same. For bigger maintenance projects, the custodial or maintenance staff should be contacted and the proper chain of command followed.
 - 5) **Rules.** Rules for the playground should be minimal so the children and supervisors can remember them and follow them! However, when establishing the rules, children should be encouraged to help. This gives the children a greater sense of ownership, not dictatorship, on the playground.
 - 6) **Training children to use equipment.** Before children are allowed to use the playground equipment at the beginning of the school year, the physical educator or a teacher should show how to use the equipment properly. Information on usage should be in a lesson planning book. It is advisable to review the information with the children in the spring.
 - 7) **Consistency of policy reinforcement.** A chain of command for enforcing discipline on the playground should be established and followed consistently. Otherwise, supervisors lose credibility with the children and confidence in themselves.

8) Supervisors should help plan playgrounds. Supervisors are an invaluable part of the planning process. Their experience about ways children use the equipment, what pieces are most popular, and what problems arise should be considered. See Planning a Play Area for Children for more details.

- **Procedures to use when a child is injured.** Policies should be established in case injuries occur. Recommendations include: having supervisors trained in first aid; having supervisors wear distinctive clothing so children can find them easily; having first aid supplies on hand; having the supervisor use a colored card system that children can tell building personnel where a child needs to go – **blue** (nurse), **green** (secretary), **yellow** (home room), **orange** (emergency, send help). When an injury occurs, make sure to file an injury report. Have the child identify a picture (from the school's collection of photos) of the specific piece of equipment where the injury occurred. Report any product hazards or product-related injuries to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission at 800-638-2772.
- **Risk management policies.** For insurance and other purposes, all schools and childcare centers should have risk management policies regarding playgrounds. A file system where reports on injuries and playground maintenance problems and repairs are kept should be established and kept up-to-date.

3. Write detailed supervision plan with policies outlined.

Make sure to cover all the areas you have researched. Before finishing the plan, try to think what unusual situations might arise and whether or not your plan covers all of those possibilities.

Remember, creating the plan is not your final step. It needs to be distributed to all supervisors and other school personnel. Have copies of policies available in designated locations and make sure all playground supervisors review materials each year. If needed, arrange new or review training for staff members.

(1) Information obtained from Risks to students in school, U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment (1995).

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