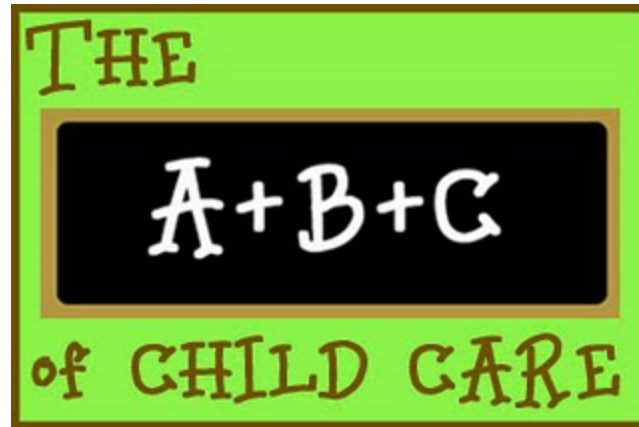


The ABC of Child Care: S is for...

June 3, 2010



S is for Supervision

Child care centers have a duty of care to create a safe environment for children and their families. When it comes to young children, effective supervision is essential to maintaining a safe place to play and learn.

Supervision, as it applies to safety within childcare, should encompass each of the following;

1. Ensuring all areas accessible to children are safe and free from hazards,
2. At all times, maintaining sufficient staff to effectively supervise the children's activities, and that
3. Staff present are utilizing effective supervision strategies.

Let's look at each of these areas more closely.

1. Ensuring all areas accessible to children are safe and free from hazards.

The center should be able to provide you with information regarding their policy and procedures for all areas of safety, including

- Managing the physical environment to ensure that buildings and equipment are safe
- Recognizing potential hazards and taking action to eliminate or control them
- Reducing the likelihood of accidents and injuries through maintenance of a safe environment
- Responding quickly and appropriately to emergencies.



2. At all times, maintaining sufficient staff to effectively supervise the children's activities.

As a parent using child care you should familiarize yourself with the child:staff ratios for children within each age group which apply in your State, and ensure that your center of choice employs enough staff to maintain them. With regards to ratios, also question;

- When children from more than one age range are grouped together, the ratio which applies to the age of the youngest child applies. For example, many centers group children of different ages together at the beginning and end of each day, when the number of children and staff present tend to be less. At these times, the staff:child ratio which applies to the youngest child present must be adhered to. How does your center manage this?
- At all times there are children present at the Center, a minimum of two staff should be present. Ask if this means that two staff members are actually present *with* the children. Sometimes, centers may count a non-contact person, like the center cook, as being present when in reality they are not easily accessible should the children or other staff member need their assistance.
- How does the center maintain ratios when staff need to remove a child due to illness, in an emergency, to bath them if soiled, or even to change a diaper or assist with toileting in another physical area? Does the center Director step in and assist or are they already counted in the staff:child ratios?

3. Staff present are utilizing effective supervision strategies.

It should be easy to see that Center staff are actively and effectively supervising the children. Active supervision enables staff to respond quickly to children's needs, ensuring that the children's play is safe and fun and that the learning opportunities of play are maximized through staff involvement with and/or in the play.

Staff effectively supervise by actively watching and attending to the environment. Observing children's play and anticipating what may happen next will allow staff to anticipate children's needs, to identify risks (and therefore minimize injury), assist with difficulties which arise, and intervene where necessary.

As well, through effective supervision, educators will see opportunities for supporting and building upon children's play themes and identify when children wish to play independently or with adult involvement.

Take a moment to stand back and observe what staff are doing. Consider;

- Are they actively scanning the play environment, even when working with one group of children, talking to parents, or attending to everyday responsibilities?
- Are they physically positioned in such a way to observe the maximum area possible?
- Do they regularly move around the area, observing and interacting with the children?
- When a staff member needs to move away from actively supervising children, do they inform fellow staff members who are also supervising the area?

- Are children closely attended while on the diaper changing table, using stairs, eating, playing with or near water?
- Are casual employees, students and volunteers required to remain within visibility of permanent staff while with the children?

Careful planning of the environment, resources, play experiences, routines and staff movements are all also important elements of effective supervision.

The ABC of Child Care series of posts aims to illustrate for parents what quality child care looks like in practice as both a tool for parents looking for child care for the first time and as a resource for all parents with children in care. As someone who ran a high quality center for many years, I believe we all share a responsibility to ask questions and expect results when it comes to the environment and people caring for and educating our youngest and most impressionable citizens.

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