

HOW TO... Supervise Youth

Carina Franca posted on May 16, 2013 17:00



...SUPERVISE YOUTH

The key is to review each activity, outing, or field trip and provide the best-qualified personnel possible, in ample numbers, to maintain the security of youth and to keep youth safe.

If any one aspect of child supervision needs to be emphasized most, it is to “never let children out of one’s sight.” Claims files are filled with tragic injuries that occurred during that brief moment when young children were left alone to their own resources.

- Establish rules and parameters and stick with them.
- Give supervision 100%. Periods of supervisory responsibility are not a time for grading papers, making personal phone calls, conversing with associates, participating in the activity or performing other activities that may distract from the actual task of supervision.
- Provide a minimum of two qualified supervisors (those with specific knowledge of the particular activity, including training, certification, degrees, etc.). Depending on the activity (museum visit, swimming, hiking, etc.) qualifications and numbers will vary. If a group is going to be broken up and separated, each group should have two supervisors. In the event of an emergency, someone may need to go for help while the other supervisor remains behind to watch the children in their care. In addition, supervision in numbers helps to prevent child abuse or accusations of child abuse. Where programs include youth that are physically or mentally challenged, additional supervision will also generally be required.

Some guidelines recommend that high-risk activities (i.e. mountain climbing) provide one adult for each 4 students. A mild-risk activity (field trip, etc.) would include one adult for each 12 students, while a low-risk activity would require one adult for each 25 students. One school district also recommends that one supervisor should be dismissing one group of children while another is supervising children who have just arrived.

The American Camping Association in early issues of their Accreditation Standards for Camp Programs and Services recommended 1 lifeguard per 25 participants and 1 lookout to each 10 participants for aquatics activities. In newer editions they have expanded on those numbers to include variables that would increase the need for more supervision. They include:

1. Environmental Hazards (pool vs. open water, tides, currents, weather conditions, water traffic, turbidity of water, etc.)

2. Experience and Qualifications of Guards (maturity and judgment, experience and knowledge, location of guards, etc.);
3. Skill Level of Swimmers (age, number of persons per square foot of water, physical condition, disabilities, etc.); and
4. Degree of Risk of Activity (other activities nearby, distance from guards to campers, degree of control, depth of water, rescue equipment available, etc.). The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and the American Red Cross, among others also provide supervisory recommendations.

Some children are more difficult to supervise than others and require staff or volunteers that have more skill in child supervision. As such, difficult children may require more attention, which takes time away from other children. More supervision may also be needed in these instances.

Carina Franca
