Supervision During Challenging Times — Responses

Look over the scenarios below and think about how you would safely secure supervision of the children in your care. How might your strategies change depending on the age, needs and developmental level of the children? In each of these scenarios, your supervision is compromised either by the lack of sight or the necessity to multi-task. After brainstorming, look at some of the suggestions we provide and see if they align with your own ideas. Talk with your family child care director or other providers about your ideas.

**What happens when you need a few minutes of personal time to use the bathroom?**

The National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC, 2013) states that providers should take no more than five minutes of personal time to attend to their needs.

If you are able, it is best to plan for these kinds of breaks. Perhaps you already know from the children’s typical schedules that morning nap time or afternoon nap time are the easiest times to break away. As best you can, try to plan your bathroom breaks during these more relaxed times in the daily schedule.

Depending on the age of the children in your care, you may set-up different activities or environments to safely occupy the children while you briefly attend to personal needs. Select an activity the children can safely engage in without direct adult engagement for a few minutes.

Perhaps you can momentarily leave a sleeping infant in a pack-and-play and have some soft blocks with which toddlers and preschoolers can build. Quickly go over the safety rules before you step away. Remind children of the safe ways to interact with the materials provided and remind them of the expectations. Use positive language to give quick reminders (e.g., “Remember to keep the blocks on the floor when stacking. I’m excited to see your structure when I return”). Even when taking a small personal break, you should be able to hear the children so you can hear any issues and respond quickly. Use your knowledge of each of the children in your care to help plan these times. Infants that are now mobile and are still learning how to safely touch others may need to be safely secured in a pack-and-play before you step away.

Never leave an infant on his or her stomach while you take a break. Make sure infants are in a secure environment before leaving to attend to your needs.

**What about during meal preparation for snacks or lunch?**

It is best to do as much of the preparation for snacks and lunch ahead of time. Before children arrive, can you already have the vegetables cut up? Or the main dish ready to be heated?
Depending on the ages of the children, you can ask some of them to help you with portions of snack or lunch set-up. Can they help put out napkins or plates? Can older children help with food preparation in small ways with supervision (e.g., washing grapes?). This strategy not only helps you with supervision, but is also a great way to foster age-appropriate responsibility. Just as with the breaks for personal time, think about safe activities the children can do during this time that don't need direct adult interaction. Children should still be within your eye sight. If you have children under 3 in your care, make sure the experience you provide does not involve small pieces that could be a choking hazard.

What about speaking with and attending to families during pick-up and drop-off times?

In order to provide high-quality care, you must take time to speak with children's families every day, to ask about their child's morning or share some highlights of the child's day. Without a give-and-take of details about each child's daily life with her or his family, it is hard to work as a team to support children's development.

However, families, without meaning to, can sometimes make supervision challenging. They may want to have a more in-depth conversation than you have time for, or they may monopolize your attention. It is important when you greet families as they arrive to drop off or pick up their child to invite them into your home where all the children are. As you speak with a family member, arrange your body so you can still see all the children in your care (e.g., perhaps with your back to a wall). If a family member wants to have an in-depth conversation that you cannot safely or respectfully have at that moment, assure the parent that you want to discuss the matter with them, but that right now you must attend to the children. Arrange a time that you will follow up, perhaps a phone call that night. Although this may feel difficult to say, it is a way of demonstrating to families your commitment to high-quality care for all the children.

If you know when families tend to drop off and pick up their children from care, you can also arrange your daily schedule to best support communication with families. Once again, perhaps have more free play or activities that do not necessitate direct adult interaction so that you can talk with families while adequately monitoring.