



PLAYGROUND SAFETY Policy

Effective Date: October 1999

Revised Date: May 2015
September 2016
September 2017
July 2023
February 2024 - *Added Benefits of Outdoor Exploration from the
Child Care Centre Licensing Manual 2024*

Attachments: *Daily Playground Checklist
Monthly Maintenance Checklist
Repairs & Maintenance Form*

Purpose

Outdoor play is an integral part of the daily schedule and plays an important role in the development of children’s overall well-being. In order for children to thrive in outdoor play, it is crucial that there be sufficient toys and equipment for the children to engage in active play and that educators engage as active participants in the play.

The How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years document describes how children thrive in programs where they can engage in vigorous physical play in natural outdoor spaces and playgrounds that present manageable levels of challenge. In addition to providing physical benefits, active play outdoors strengthens functioning in cognitive areas such as perception, attention, creative problem-solving and complex thinking.

While these environments need to be safe, it is also important for them to provide children with interesting opportunities for a reasonable degree of risk-taking.

The purpose of this policy is to set out the responsibilities of the Centre, staff, placement students and volunteers in ensuring that the outdoor and playground spaces provide a safe and well-supervised environment for children’s play and meet Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standards.

This policy is intended to fulfill the obligations set out under Ontario Regulations 137/15 for a Playground Safety Policy for childcare centres.

This policy addresses the issues around playground supervision, outdoor activities, record keeping, playground inspections (daily, monthly and annually), playground repair, maintenance logs and the rotation of programs on the playground. It is intended to be used as a tool to keep the children safe on a day-to-day basis in their outdoor environment and to identify and rectify issues or repairs quickly.

In General:

- Faith Infant and Early Education Centre will ensure that there are enough play materials available that are appropriate for the children's age and learning and developmental needs during outdoor play.
- The maximum capacity of 64 children on the playground will not be exceeded at any time.
- All the children within the Centre are required to be outdoors for a minimum of two hours per day for physical education, learning opportunities, and simply being in nature.
- Outdoor time is generally one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon.
- Children attending our before and after care program spend time outdoors directly after school until 4 pm. Their requirement is 30 minutes per day and 2 hours when attending on a full day.
- Time outdoors is weather dependent, including extreme heat and humidity or extreme cold with wind chill factors.
- Our cut-off numbers for outdoor education are 30 degrees above zero with the humidex and common sense and **-15 to -20 degrees** below zero with wind chill and common sense.
- Ensure that children are dressed appropriately before going outside. All zippers are zipped, mittens or hats are on properly, and there are no choking hazards on their clothing.

Benefits of Outdoor Exploration:

There are many benefits to being and playing outdoors. In addition to being important for growing their physical abilities, research shows that connecting to the outside world and nature helps to support children's mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health. Being outdoors can help children to:

- stay healthy
- improve movement skills
- have fun and feel happy
- develop self-confidence
- improve learning and attention

Children are to be provided with many opportunities to engage with nature. All varieties of natural environments provide opportunities to enhance children's sense of wonder and joy in the world around them.

The environment is to be used as the children's "third teacher," so staff need to think about how to set up outdoor games and activities that give children opportunities to:

- actively explore and investigate what they are naturally curious about
- test their limits physically

- take manageable risks appropriate for their age and abilities
- engage in creative problem-solving

Roles and Responsibilities of Employees

Ratios must always be maintained when on the playground with the children.

Childcare staff are to position themselves strategically throughout the playground to maximize their view of the children and ensure safe supervision. The rotation of positions around the playground for visibility and interactions with the children is essential. Outdoor play should be a positive and interactive experience for all of the children involved.

1. **Activity Table:**

The wooden activity table is designed for staff and children to use when planning activities. Bins of toys fit nicely underneath the table for the children to choose and engage in fine motor skills. Additional activities such as sensory or crafts can also be set up on the activity table for a variety for the children to choose from.

2. **Balance Beams:**

The two balance beams in the playground are designed for the children to learn to balance and jump on while trying not to fall off. The teachers can do a follow-the-leader activity or use them as a jumping apparatus.

The beams are located above the soft surfacing, which will hinder accidents should a child slip or fall off. Children are permitted to use the beams as they see fit for their activity level. While inspecting the beams, ensure that no sharp points or splinters are developing.

3. **Canopy Umbrellas:**

Canopy umbrellas were installed in the playground in June 2023 after the standing pergola was removed. These canopy umbrellas remain covered from May to November each year. During the winter months, the installation company will arrive to remove the cover to be stored for the winter months.

4. **Climbing Structures:**

All children are to be supervised while on the climbing structures in the playground. The structures that are in place are age-appropriate for the groups using them, and therefore, all children in their proper playground are permitted to engage in activities on them.

One staff should maintain their position of supervision at the structure to ensure that the children can climb up safely and give assistance if needed.

5. **Engagement & Planning:**

Engagement: During outdoor play, teachers are to be *fully engaged* with the children, whether in a small group or individually. This time is spent having conversations and exploring with the children. It is not a time to sit on the picnic or activity table or along the garden or leaning on a post or fence. It is also not a time for teacher chatter while ignoring the children. Engagement is participating with the children while expanding their learning or just having some fun.

Planning: Children need more than wheeled toys and balls to engage. Take time to plan something, engage them in a game of basketball or jump rope. Bring out the paints and chalk and do some art projects. There are so many things that can be happening to engage the children in nature. Use your imagination and follow the children's lead-up through the garden to plant or explore the insects and worms. Talk about them and investigate them on the computer once inside. You can easily bring the inside out, and you can also bring the outside in.

6. **Gates:**

The opening staff will ensure that the padlocks on the playground gates are unlocked however, not removed. Leaving the padlock on the gate ensures that no one can open the gate from the inside or outside but allows access in the event of an evacuation.

The closing staff will ensure that the padlock is secured before leaving the playground at the end of the day.

7. **Safety Gear:**

Toys requiring helmets, such as scooters, must comply with the safety standards before any child is permitted to ride. Each child wearing a helmet must have a hat or hood underneath the helmet for sanitary purposes. Each helmet must be adjusted to fit each child properly. Other safety guards must also be fitted to each child, such as wrist guards or elbow pads, to maintain an environment of safe play.

8. **Sandbox:**

Each morning, when the sandbox is uncovered, it is to be checked for foreign objects before allowing the children to play. Should the sand be dry, it is to be watered down and raked to help prevent sand from blowing into the children's faces.

Children should be encouraged to keep the sand in the sandbox and the surrounding area of the sandbox. Sand toys should be shaken clean before returning them to the sand toy bin.

Staff are to maintain the sandbox area clean, which will require, from time to time, sweeping the sand and returning it to the box. Should the children enjoy this activity, they can also be encouraged to help keep the area clean. Sand that is left in the grassy area will quickly deteriorate that area. All staff are encouraged to rake or sweep the sand daily to help keep the surfacing intact.

9. Shed

The shed has areas divided inside for each program to store toys and activities that are age-appropriate for their particular group. When removing or replacing the items, ensure that they are put away neatly in the proper spot. When the shed gets overcrowded, it isn't easy to obtain the items that you need, and items then get broken more easily.

10. Wheeled Toy Area:

Each playground has a designated wheeled toy area. This area is to maintain safety amongst the entire group of children. Children are permitted to ride their toys on the concrete area of the larger playground and in the smaller playground on the rubberized tiles.

Playground Inspection Log

The playground, along with the fixed play structures in each playground, are constructed to meet the requirement set out in the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standard CAN/CSA-Z614-14, "Children's Playspaces and Equipment." In the event of repairs or renovations, written confirmation of compliance with the CSA standard will be obtained from a Certified Playground Safety Inspector.

Every inspection of the playground, play structures and surfacing is documented. All reports related to the playground inspections are kept for a minimum of 3 years and made available to the Ministry of Education for review at the time of inspection.

1. Daily Inspections and Duties:

Daily inspections are to be conducted each morning before entering either playground. This inspection will be conducted by the first program staff that arrives at the playground, depending upon the schedules and the playground used.

The inspection is to be recorded, along with the date and time, on the Daily Playground Log Checklist. Any items listed are to be corrected while doing the inspection or reported to the staff member appointed as the *Playground Safety Staff*.

Once the inspection is complete and the playground is safe for the children, then they are permitted to engage in outdoor play.

2. Monthly Maintenance Inspections:

The Playground Safety Staff will inspect the playground on a monthly basis. Inspections can be arranged when numbers are low, first thing in the morning or at the end of the day. The findings of this inspection are to be recorded on the Monthly Playground Log Checklist and signed.

Any issues needing attention are to be reported to the *Supervisor*, who will create a Repairs and Maintenance form. This form will be submitted to the Administrator or the Repairs and Maintenance person.

Playground Repair & Maintenance Form:

- Forms are available in the wall file by the laundry room,
- Complete a description of any issues needing attention,
- Report the issue to the Supervisor along with the form,
- Outside agencies or inside resources will be contacted for repairs,
- Documentation such as conversations, emails, invoices, and timelines will be attached to the Repairs & Maintenance form
- Once the item is complete, the Management Team will sign off on the Playground Log Binder and the Repairs and Maintenance form.
- Repairs and maintenance are to be done promptly.

3. Annual Inspection:

A third-party Certified Playground Safety Inspector conducts this inspection generally during the summer months. This agency has no affiliation with the Centre, manufacturer or supplier of the playground equipment. It runs as an independent party with certification and proof of current Professional Errors and Omissions insurance coverage.

This comprehensive inspection will include the layout of the playground, including landscape both inside and surrounding, and maintenance recommendations, including repairs and safety concerns. A full report will be received and reviewed by the Management Team, who will then work in collaboration with the Playground Safety Staff to remedy any red flags with a Playground Action Plan.

According to the CCEYA (Section 3.17), this inspection is conducted to ensure that the outdoor play spaces, fixed structures and surfacing meet Canadian Standards Association standards (the Standard) to support safety and reduce injuries on the Centre playground.

Playground Action Plan

Should an inspection report or the Certified Playground Safety Inspector make recommendations and report the need for repairs or alterations and renovations, a Playground Action Plan will be put into place that will contain the who, what, where, when and how. This action plan will contain:

- WHO: one quote or estimate from a reputable company,
- WHAT: the item(s) that is required,
- WHERE: which playground requires repair,
- WHEN: a timeline or secured date as to when the repair will happen and
- HOW: the process that will need to be in place to put the action plan into place.

For recommendations and repairs: When the Certified Playground Safety Inspector makes recommendations and notes items in need of minimal repair, the Management Team will work quickly to fulfil what has been noted and document what was completed in the annual report.

For alterations and renovations: A Playground Action Plan will be prepared to be submitted, along with the annual playground report, to the Ministry for approval. The plan will take place from notes

on the annual inspection report OR should the Centre wish to make alterations or renovations to the current playground surfacing or structures. Protocols are according to CCEYA (Subsection 3.18). Should the Centre wish to make alterations or renovations to the outdoor play space, the program advisor can provide information about the regional approval process.

Should repairs to the playground take time, all reasonable steps shall be taken to bar access to the defective equipment. The defective area will be cordoned off safely without the use of warning/danger signs and or the use of ropes or plastic tape.

Playground Rotation Schedule

Each program has an allotted time for both morning and afternoon outdoor exploration. In understanding that children can have great experiences while outdoors, it is understood should one group choose to remain outdoors for a learning experience, they need to inform the next group that will be coming outside to ensure the safety of all of the children.

Infants and toddlers are to be separated from the other children during outdoor activities and have their own fenced playground; however, they are permitted to remain outside together, provided that non-walking infants are safely separated from those who are walking. Separation can be achieved by having the non-walkers on a mat with one teacher while the other teachers engage the walkers.

Although gathering together is not encouraged, during the warmer months, it is permitted, provided that each program is following the lead of the children wanting to remain outside.

Staff Review

The Playground Safety Policy will be reviewed with staff, placement students and volunteers before employment or placement or if there is a significant change and annually after that.

Outdoor play space

24. (1) Every licensee shall ensure that each child care centre it operates that has a program that runs for six hours or more in a day has an outdoor play space that is at least equivalent to 5.6 square metres for each child based on the licensed capacity, unless otherwise approved by a director.

(2) Where the licensed capacity of a child care centre is greater than 64 children, the outdoor play space referred to in subsection (1) may be divided into two or more areas by a fence to allow all the children to use the play space at one time, if each fenced-in area is not used for more than 64 children at one time.

(4) Every licensee shall ensure that, at each child care centre it operates, any outdoor play space, fixed play structure or surfacing under those structures that is constructed or renovated on or after August 29, 2016 meets the requirements set out in the Canadian Standards Association standard CAN/CSA-Z614-14, "Children's playspaces and equipment", as amended from time to time. O. Reg. 126/16, s. 18 (2).

(5) Every licensee shall ensure that at each child care centre it operates,

- (a) a playground safety policy is developed that reflects the Canadian Standards Association standard mentioned in subsection (4) and indicates the roles and responsibilities of employees regarding safety on playgrounds;
- (b) daily, monthly and annual inspections of the outdoor play space, fixed play structures and surfacing are conducted in accordance with the requirements set out in the Canadian Standards Association standard mentioned in subsection (4);
- (c) a plan is developed on how issues or problems identified in a playground inspection will be addressed; and
- (d) a playground repair log is maintained. O. Reg. 126/16, s. 18 (2).