



SAFE SUPERVISION PRACTICES

A guide for licensed child care centres and family home child care agencies



ELCC Practice & Policy Support

Safe Supervision for Regulated Early Learning and Child Care Programs

This resource supports Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) programs with implementing safe, consistent, regulation-aligned supervision practices. It is intended to accompany your program's internal policies, the Nova Scotia Early Learning and Child Care Regulations, and the principles of *Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework* ([NSELCF](#)).

1. Importance of Safe Supervision Practices

High-quality supervision is one of the most important responsibilities in an early learning and child care setting. It ensures that children are seen, heard, and supported every moment they are in your care. Supervision is an active, intentional practice that protects children's physical safety while also supporting their learning, relationships, regulation, and sense of well-being.

Effective supervision practices must address both prevention and response. While the goal is that children are always accounted for, programs must have clear, rehearsed plans for what to do if a child is not where they are expected to be. This includes understanding reporting requirements for serious incidents and having immediate internal procedures that staff can follow confidently and consistently.

2. Nova Scotia's Early Learning and Child Care Regulations

Your program's supervision practices must comply with the [Nova Scotia Early Learning and Child Care Regulations](#). Sections that directly relate to supervision include:

Section 33A – Supervision

33A A facility director, agency director or care provider must ensure that every child is accounted for at all times during operating hours, including during outings and field trips, and that no child leaves the indoor or outdoor play space or the facility or, in the case of a family home child-care program, the play group space or family home without the knowledge of the staff or care provider.

Section 34 – Ratios and Maximum Group Size

See tables [Section 34](#), subsection (1) and (3) for the most up-to-date information on required ratio. Remember:

34(4) If there are groups of children from more than 1 category set out in the tables in subsections (1) and (3) in a single room in a facility, then the ratio and group size for all

children in the room must not exceed the staff-to-children ratio and maximum group size applicable to the youngest child in the room.

Licensed Child Care Example: It's early morning drop off, and one educator is with seven preschoolers in the preschool room when a toddler arrives. Because the room now includes a younger age group, the program must immediately follow the ratio and group size requirements for the youngest child present.

Family Home Child Care Example: A provider cares for six mixed-age children during the day to allow space for their own school-aged child, who returns home later. Because the provider's child is included in the total number of children in care, the provider must ensure the maximum group size and ratio requirements are not exceeded when their child returns.

Section 30B – Serious Incidents

Per [Section 30B\(1\)](#), a child not accounted for during any period of time constitutes a serious incident.

- (2) All of the following must be done when a serious incident occurs:
 - (a) any necessary medical assistance must be immediately secured, and all possible efforts made to notify the parents of any child affected;
 - (b) the licensee must be notified no later than 24 hours after the time the serious incident occurs;
 - (c) a summary report that meets the requirements of clause 30A(2)(b) must be prepared and a copy placed in the file of each affected child no later than 7 days after the date the serious incident occurs;
 - (d) except as provided in subsection (4), the Department must be advised of the serious incident no later than 24 hours after the time the serious incident occurs.
- (3) The person responsible for the serious incident procedures required by subsection (2) is:
 - (a) for a serious incident that occurs at a facility or in respect of a child-care program at a facility, the facility director;
 - (b) for a serious incident that occurs at a family child-care home,
 - (i) except for the requirement in clause (2)(d), the care provider for the home,
 - (ii) for the requirement in clause (2)(d), the agency director.
- (4) An agency must ensure that the Department is advised of any serious incident in a family home child-care program no later than 24 hours after the time the agency becomes aware of the serious incident.

Section 32 – Daily Record of Attendance

Section 32 indicates the requirements related to maintaining a daily record of attendance:

- (1) A daily record of attendance for each child enrolled in a child-care program must be kept by the facility director or care provider.
- (2) A daily record of attendance must include the child's arrival and departure times and reasons for any absence.

3. Best Practices for Safe Supervision

The following supervision practices support the six areas emphasized in the ELCC Resource: [*Count on It: Every Child, Every Time*](#) and reflect evidence-informed approaches to child safety and well-being. The following sections expand each practice with guidance for program implementation.

Definitions:

Transition: when children move from one experience, routine, or physical space to another (e.g., going outdoors, moving to lunch, joining a small-group experience).

Small group: a subset of children moving or engaging with one educator, in accordance with required ratios.

Daily Record of Attendance: a permanent, primary record of children's attendance.

Portable attendance: a record that travels with small groups when they leave the primary program space (e.g., gym, library, outdoor learning areas).

Visual attendance: a tool that helps educators quickly recognize children and reflect each child's current location (e.g., photo boards, name tags, magnets, or symbol-based systems).

3A. Count Children

Counting children is a continuous and intentional part of safe practices. Educators know which children are in their care at all times and maintain accurate attendance records.

- ✓ **Count at every entrance and exit:** Counting happens whenever the group enters or leaves a space. Educators pause, scan, and complete a face-to-name check before moving on. Place prompts, such as the [*Count on It: Every Child, Every Time*](#) poster, by doors as visual cues to remind educators to count consistently. Provide ongoing modelling for staff to reinforce this expectation and support consistent practice.
- ✓ **Count before and after transitions, and regularly during outdoor play:** Transitions are moments of movement and unpredictability, so educators build counting into these routines. Counting during outdoor play means checking children every few minutes or when play shifts to



a new area. Frequent checks help educators respond to children's cues and maintain awareness of their location and well-being.

- ✓ **Don't take shortcuts when counting – match each child's face to the attendance record:** Counting is not just a number. Educators intentionally match each child they see to the attendance record. Arrival and departure times are completed by educators in pen, ensuring the record is accurate and dependable throughout the day.
- ✓ **Use visual attendance boards with photos or name tags:** Visual attendance tools support accuracy, particularly when educators are getting to know new children and during high-movement times such as arrival, pick-up, outdoor play, and small-group learning. Educators keep visuals up to date, so they always reflect each child's current location, indoors, outdoors, or in an alternate learning space.
- ✓ **Establish a system that documents and reflects the number of children present in a space:** As groups are added or removed, this system ensures that accurate information is clearly visible to all educators. Educators work collaboratively to monitor and maintain consistent and accurate counts. For example, educators might use a whiteboard in an outdoor space to update counts in real time as groups move in and out (e.g., between indoor environment and outdoor play area), helping to ensure everyone has a clear and shared understanding of how many children are present at all times.

Pause and Reflect

- How can attendance routines be streamlined so they support children's play without interruption?
- What supports help educators communicate the number of children in their care?
- Where might visual prompts strengthen counting habits?
- What is the backup plan if a digital attendance tool stops working?

3B. Supervise Actively

Active supervision is warm and relational. Educators join play, narrate children's experiences, and offer support, all while maintaining awareness of the full group.

- ✓ **Position yourself to see and hear all children:** Educators intentionally position themselves to ensure full visibility and active supervision across the entire environment. They are mindful to spread out rather than cluster together, allowing for consistent coverage of all areas. As children move, educators adjust their placement to maintain clear sightlines, anticipate emerging needs, and respond proactively to prevent concerns from escalating.
- ✓ **Scan the environment continuously:** Scanning is an ongoing rhythm – look across high-energy areas, quieter corners, and potential blind spots. This supports early responses to children's cues, allowing educators to step in before small concerns escalate. Scanning also includes noticing changes in your team: for example, if one educator shifts into a one-on-one moment with a child who needs extra reassurance, another educator may reposition from a focused play area (like the block area) to ensure the whole room remains fully supervised.

- ✓ **Stay close to children who need extra support:** Some children benefit from proximity during transitions, group play, or high-movement activities. Staying close helps them regulate, feel secure, and participate fully.
- ✓ **Use portable attendance that travels with each group:** When small groups move to another space, portable attendance ensures educators can account for every child while remaining attentive and responsive. See Appendix [A](#) and [B](#) for more information.

Licensed Child Care Example: A small group heads to the outdoor learning area with one educator. Prior to leaving, the educator notes on the main attendance sheet the name of the children who they are taking. The educator brings the portable attendance clipboard with the five children's names. When the group arrives, the educator quickly does a face-to-name check against the attendance sheet before beginning play. When returning to the main learning environment, the educator checks off the same names again and updates the attendance record to show the group has rejoined.

Family Home Child Care Example: A provider transitions the children from the main indoor play area to the outdoor play space. The provider brings the portable attendance record with the children's names. Upon arriving outside, the provider quickly checks each child against the record before beginning play. When returning indoors, the provider repeats the face-to-name check and updates the attendance record to confirm all children have returned to the home.

Pause and Reflect

- Which children in your program benefit from proximity during certain parts of the day?
- How does educator positioning shift as play and routines evolve?
- How do scanning habits help educators notice early cues for support?

3C. Communicate with Team Members

Clear, predictable communication among educators ensures shared awareness of who is in the group, where children are located, and who is responsible for each part of a transition.

- ✓ **Verify attendance verbally or in writing after each educator or child transition, and at every educator or group change:** When educators change, or groups move, a brief verbal check supports accuracy and ensures all team members know the number and names of children present. See [Appendix C](#) for more information.

Examples of educator transitions:

- An educator returns from lunch and joins the room.
- A morning educator leaves for a scheduled break.
- A new educator arrives to begin their shift.

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- ✓ **Ensure attendance records reflect children's movement between rooms:** When a child transitions from one room to another or spends time in a space that is not their primary room, they must be signed out of one room and recorded in the other. Attendance records should be updated consistently and in real time to ensure children's locations are accurately documented throughout the day, particularly during transition periods such as the beginning and end of the day, when children may be temporarily grouped with others.
 - ✓ **Ensure all educators know their roles during transitions:** Before transitions begin, educators clarify who will lead the group, who will count, and who will support individual children. This predictability reduces confusion and supports smoother movement.
 - ✓ **Collaborate to avoid assumptions – say what you're doing and who you're responsible for:** Educators check in with each other regularly, especially when children join or leave groups unexpectedly. These quick communication habits strengthen team coordination.
 - ✓ **Using predictable phrasing supports clear communication and shared understanding among educators.** For example, educators might state, "I'm taking three children to the bathroom," or "You now have six children," to ensure responsibilities are clearly defined and no assumptions are made about supervision. Educators should also confirm that their colleague has acknowledged the information before proceeding, ensuring continuity of care.

Pause and Reflect

- What strategies help educators communicate clearly during transitions?
- How do educators ensure shared responsibility when group sizes change?
- How are new or substitute educators supported to follow communication routines?

3D. Assess the Environment

Assessing the environment means noticing risks, maintaining visibility, and arranging spaces so children can move safely and confidently through their day.

- ✓ **Conduct regular risk assessments of indoor and outdoor environments:** Educators scan the environment throughout the day to identify shifting risks – such as changing sightlines, moving materials, or high-energy play – and make small adjustments to ensure all areas remain safe and visible.
- ✓ **Check fences, gates, exits, and equipment daily:** Educators test latches, inspect fences, and check equipment for stability so children can move freely and safely in the space.
- ✓ **Remove hazards and rearrange furniture to improve visibility of children:** Learning environment layouts shift as children engage in play. Educators adjust shelves, mats, and materials to ensure all areas remain observable without interrupting play.
- ✓ **Be aware of hiding spots and blind zones:** Educators identify areas where children may hide or slip out of sight and adjust the environment, or their positioning, accordingly.

Pause and Reflect

- How does the layout support children's calm movement through transitions?
- What environmental changes could reduce rushing or waiting?
- Which areas consistently require increased educator presence?

3E. Plan Transitions

Well-planned transitions help children move safely and calmly between activities, with minimal waiting and smooth, predictable routines that reflect their developmental needs.

- ✓ **Prepare children and educators for changes in activity or location – give clear notices before transitions:** Visual cues, countdowns, and simple language help children know what is coming next, reducing stress and promoting regulation.

Examples of transition notices:

- Showing a picture card (e.g., “snack,” “outdoors”) before announcing the transition.
- Using a gentle chime to signal “two minutes left.”
- Saying, “In one minute, we’re heading inside,” while holding up one finger.
- Using a visual timer so children can see when the transition is coming.

- ✓ **Be intentional about the number and length of transitions throughout the day:** Consider how many quick transitions occur before, during, and after activities, as well as how long each transition takes. Too many transitions, or transitions that take too long, create more opportunities for children to become dysregulated or unaccounted for. Streamlining transitions and reducing unnecessary movement between spaces supports both active supervision and children’s overall well-being.
- ✓ **Transition children in small groups:** Small-group movement reduces waiting time and allows educators to respond more easily to individual children’s cues.

Example: As toddlers get dressed for outdoor play, the first six children who are ready go outside with one educator, while the second educator stays inside supporting the remaining six, reducing waiting and helping children move calmly.

- ✓ **Ensure small groups leaving the room are reflected on the main attendance record:** Educators update the attendance record when children leave for a small-group experience and adjust it again upon their return.
- ✓ **Use individualized transition plans when needed:** Children who need additional support receive tailored strategies to help them participate successfully (e.g., extra time, visual schedules, sensory tools).

Have transition play materials available: Transition play materials are simple, portable items that help children remain engaged and regulated while waiting for their turn during transitions (e.g., a basket of board books, soft puppets, small fidget objects, picture cards, a set of calming items like textured balls or scarves). Educators offer these materials strategically during predictable waiting moments, such as while other children finish washing hands, lining up, or putting on outdoor clothing.

Pause and Reflect

- How can transitions be planned to meet the individual needs of children?
- Where can waiting time be reduced?
- How much of the day is spent transitioning between activities?



3F. Create Support Plans

Every child brings unique strengths and needs; develop, document, and implement individualized support plans as appropriate (e.g., Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) plans, Routine Based Plans (RBPs)).

- ✓ **Know each child's temperament, needs, and stressors:** Understanding how each child responds to movement, noise, or waiting helps educators design supportive routines.
- ✓ **Collaborate with families and team members to support individual needs:** Families provide valuable insight into how their child communicates and what strategies are effective at home, helping to promote consistency across environments.
- ✓ **Adjust supervision strategies to match developmental levels:** Some children may need additional prompts, proximity, or time to move through transitions safely.
- ✓ **Develop individualized support plans when needed and review them regularly:** Plans evolve as children grow. Educators revisit strategies often to ensure they remain responsive and effective.

Pause and Reflect

- Which children in your program would benefit from individualized transition supports?
- What cues indicate a child needs additional help?
- How are families included in shaping supportive strategies?

4. Responding When a Child Is Unaccounted For

Even with strong supervision practices, incidents can occur. Programs should have a clear, rehearsed internal response plan aligned with regulatory reporting requirements. Ensure the plan is readily accessible to educators, for example, by printing it on the back of the attendance sheet or attaching it to the attendance clipboard.

Sample plan (modify to reflect your practices):

Activate immediately when a count doesn't match:

1. **Stop & Secure** – Immediately pause all activities and transitions, secure the group and complete a full recount of all children.
 - **In settings with more than one educator:** One educator remains with the group to maintain supervision and complete the recount, and a second educator begins the search, following the site map.
 - **In single-educator settings (e.g., family home):** Gather all children together in a safe, visible location and keep them within sight at all times. Conduct a quick visual scan of the immediate area (last known location and nearby spaces) **without leaving the group unsupervised**. If the child is not immediately located, move promptly to notification steps (e.g., call for emergency support) before expanding the search.
2. **Search Systematically** – Check last known area → adjacent rooms → washrooms → closets/cubby areas → exits/stairwells → outdoor perimeter in expanding circles; assign staff to doorways and exit points.
3. **Notify** – Inform the program lead/FHCC Agency Director/designate; call 911 if risk is suspected; notify the Department within 24 hours as per regulation 30B (2)(d); inform family per the Family Communications Plan.
4. **Document** – Record times, locations checked, who searched, when the child was located, and any contributing factors (e.g., a head count wasn't completed during the transition).
5. **Report** – Complete all Serious Incident reporting as required under [Section 30B](#) of the NS ELCC Regulations once the situation is stabilized (See [Appendix D](#)).
6. **Debrief & Correct** – Review supervision practices (counts, staff positioning, transitions, environment); update procedures, signage, and staff training. Consider additional support plans if needed.

Pause and Reflect

- What practices ensure educators are ready to act without delay when a child is unaccounted for?
- What practices are in place to ensure educators know what their roles and responsibilities are during a response?
- How prepared is the team to follow the response plan confidently in both single and multi-educator settings?



5. Roles for Volunteers, Students and Families

On occasion, your program may have students, volunteers or families assisting. While these individuals would not be considered a part of the staff-to-child ratio, training and coaching on safe supervision practices are highly encouraged.

- Pair the volunteer with an educator. Do not assign independent counting or group supervision responsibilities to volunteers.
- Provide a brief orientation covering boundaries, where to stand/sit during activities, what to do in an emergency, and how to direct safety concerns to educators.
- On outings/field trips, give written route and meeting points, contact info, and rules for movement (e.g., adults at front/rear, stop points, bathroom protocols).
- Clearly state these expectations in your orientation and daily program materials.

For More Information

If you have questions about these practices or regulatory expectations, please contact your Quality Assurance Specialist (QAS).

For general inquiries, email: ECDServices@novascotia.ca

Early Learning and Child Care Branch
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
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Halifax, Nova Scotia B3K 2Y5

Appendix A

The following provides an example of an attendance log designed for an infant room. The addition of each child's date of birth supports the ongoing monitoring and maintenance of appropriate staff-to-child ratios, regardless of whether the primary educator is present. When dividing into small groups, implement a system to clearly show which children have left the main program space. This can be done by using a portable attendance record and updating the Main Attendance Record to reflect who is out of the room.

For example, an educator may write on a post-it note that they are taking four children for a walk, sign it, and place it on the Main Attendance Record.

See [Appendix B](#) for additional information on portable attendance.

A sample template is available [here](#).

Child Care Program Attendance Log

Room: Infant 1

Educators: Kersten Herring and Devon Clarke

Week of: June 1st, 2026 to June 5th, 2026

S= Sick
V= Vacation
HD= Home day
A= Absent with no notification

Name of Child (First, Last)	Date of Birth (DD/MM/YY)	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
		Time IN	Time OUT	Time IN	Time OUT	Time IN	Time OUT	Time IN	Time OUT	Time IN	Time OUT
Amara Thomas	03/06/2025	A	A	9:00 am	4:30 pm	8:30 am	2:30 pm	7:47 am	3:59 pm	June 4: Kersten took small group on a walk: Amara, Olivia, Maia, and Chen.	
Olivia Lee	02/08/2025	9:24 am	4:00 pm	9:03 am	4:10 pm	9:15 am	3:55 pm	8:00 am	4:28 pm		
Miguel Pedro	25/09/2025	7:35 am	4:20 pm	7:55 am	4:10 pm	7:20 am	4:05 pm	7:45 am	3:44 pm		
Maia Sandu	30/04/2025	8:35 am	4:40 pm	8:15 am	5:30 pm	9:22 am	4:45 pm	8:17 am	5:13 pm		
Lailah Akita	03/04/2025	11:15 am	3:45 pm	9:28 am	4:30 pm	9:15 am	2:25 pm	9:03 am	4:55 pm		
Marco Silva	07/07/2025	8:10 am	5:06 pm	8:16 am	11:20 am	S	S	S	S		
Chen Zhao	05/05/2025	8:15 am	4:05 pm	7:55 am	4:28 pm	8:50 am	5:10 pm	8:34 am	5:25 pm		
Noor El-Sayed	07/29/2025	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V		
Total # of children present		6		7		6		6			
Notes:											

Appendix B

This portable attendance log reflects a small group experience offered within the infant room. It is used to identify and track the children who have temporarily left the main program space, providing educators with a clear and immediate reference to those in their care during small group experiences. As demonstrated in [Appendix A](#), this information is also represented on the Main Attendance Record using a post-it note, ensuring that both records consistently and accurately reflect the whereabouts of all children. This supports safe and effective supervision practices.

A sample template is available [here](#).

Portable Attendance Log

Room: Infant 1

Location (onsite or off-site): On a community walk

Educator(s) responsible: Kersten Herring

Name of Child (First, Last)	Date: June 4 th , 2026			
	Time OUT	Time IN		
Amara Thomas	9:30 am	10:45 am		
Olivia Lee	9:30 am	10:45 am		
Maia Sandu	9:30 am	10:45 am		
Chen Zhao	9:30 am	10:45 am		
Total # of children				
Reflection question: Do I know exactly who is with me, what they need, and where the others are?				
Reminders: ☐ Has the Main Attendance Record been updated? ☐ Do responsible educators have emergency contact information for all children and a first aid kit? ☐ Do responsible educators have all required medical information for children in their care (e.g., Epi pen)?				
Notes:				

Appendix C

Below is an example of a written verification form for a toddler room. This form is used to document staff transitions as educators move in and out of the room or assume responsibility for different groups of children. When educators move, the form is completed to confirm the number of children present and to clearly indicate which educator(s) is responsible at that time. This process ensures that all team members are aware of current attendance, supports accurate headcounts, and helps maintain required staff-to-child ratios. It also promotes clear communication and accountability, contributing to safe and consistent supervision practices.

A sample template is available [here](#).

Written Verification of Staff Transitions

Room: Toddler 4

Educators: Taniya Yusef, Jamie Benoit, Rose Faiz

Date	Type of Staff Transition	Time	Number of Children	Initials
May 17th	Staff arrival	7:30 am	0	TY
	Staff arrival	8:15 am	6	JB
	Staff arrival	8:45 am	12	RF
	Staff break/coverage	9:30 am	17	TY out YL in
	Staff return/Staff break	10:00 am	18	TY in JB out
	Staff return/Staff break	10:30	18	JB in RF out
	Staff lunch	12:30	18	TY

Appendix D

The following is a sample template that can be used to report serious incidents to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, as outlined in Regulation 30B(2) and available on the department's website in [English](#) and [French](#).



Serious Incident Reporting Form

Registered centre/agency name:							
If there are multiple sites, name of site:							
Form completed by:	Position:						
Phone:	Date of incident (MM/DD/YYYY):						
Email:							
NOTE: All serious incidents outlined in Regulation 30B(1) must be reported to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development no later than 24 hours after the time of the incident. All reports are to be submitted to: ECDServices@novascotia.ca. Please indicate which serious incident you are reporting: ☐ injury to a child that required emergency medical attention while attending a child-care program (Emergency medical attention refers to any injury that requires immediate attention by the program staff, including: calling 911; an ambulance; and/or an emergency room visit or a doctor's office when there is no emergency department available.) ☐ fire or other disaster on the premises of a facility, agency, play group space, or family child-care home ☐ child not accounted for during any period of time (as required by Section 33A) ☐ concern or occurrence relating to an element of the physical environment or an operational or safety practice in a facility or a family child-care home that poses a risk to the children's health, safety, or well-being ☐ death of a child while attending a child-care program Summary To ensure privacy and confidentiality, please <i>do not include any names, or other identifiers, of children involved</i>. If more information is required, the licensee will be contacted. <table border="1"><tr><td>Age of child:</td><td>Location incident occurred:</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">Child's injury (if applicable):</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">Brief summary of the incident and actions taken:</td></tr></table>		Age of child:	Location incident occurred:	Child's injury (if applicable):		Brief summary of the incident and actions taken:	
Age of child:	Location incident occurred:						
Child's injury (if applicable):							
Brief summary of the incident and actions taken:							
Department Use Only—Reviewer Information							
Name (print):	Title:						
Signature:	Date of review (MM/DD/YYYY):						