




Adventist Risk Management, Inc.



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Appropriate Supervision for Youth Counselors

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Did you know that about two-thirds of the claims against church entities involve allegations of improper supervision? In fact, approximately 45 percent of playground-related injuries are associated with lack of or inadequate supervision, according to Safe Kids Worldwide.

Supervision is almost always an issue when a claim is presented, particularly those involving children and youth. So, what is adequate supervision? When it comes down to it, two elements equal appropriate supervision in any event: **quantity and quality**. It is not only the number of supervisors per participant, but also the quality of the supervisors participating in your event.

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If you were to find yourself in a situation in which a participant was injured, what questions would be asked about supervision? Here is a list of questions that have been presented straight from the ARM claim files:

- How did you train the supervisors on what you expected them to do?
 - How did you tell them?
 - What materials were distributed?
 - Did the materials include an emergency plan?
 - Did you require all supervisors to attend the training or orientation?
- Did you inform the supervisors on which five, six, or eight participants they were specifically responsible for?
- Did they know these participants' names?
 - Did they meet each participant before the event?
 - Did they have access to contact information for each member of their respective group?
- Did they know each participant's medical condition?
- Did you instruct them of what to do in an emergency?

In previous situations in which ARM became involved, there have been situations where a parent supervisor would say, "I didn't know what to do. Nobody told me. We didn't have an orientation. I figured I was just along to watch the kids." This lack of clarity constitutes evidence of unpreparedness or indifference and disregard for the well-being of the children being supervised. On the contrary, being prepared will not prevent every problem, but it will minimize problems, injuries and will constitute evidence supporting that the supervisors are properly prepared.

Appropriate supervision that accounts for both the *quantity* and *quality* of your chaperones is critical. When supervisors are prepared and engaged, it will minimize the chance of injury and other problems. When this happens, your loss prevention efforts will enjoy greater success. In fact, proper preparation of supervisors is loss prevention. The safety and well being of each child or youth under your organization's care is of the greatest importance. Cost savings and claim prevention naturally result when emphasis is put on properly caring for those in your care. Aim for these outings to result in lifelong memories and lasting friendships, not in life altering tragic injury or worse.

"Proper preparation of supervisors is loss prevention."

Boosting the Quality of Your Supervision

How can you improve the quality of your supervision, minimize risks, and better prepare your chaperones? Take the time to train them. As a leader, use these guidelines to ensure your chaperones are well equipped to provide quality supervision.

Conduct a site visit to the facilities or the area you will be visiting. Evaluate the area and familiarize yourself with your contact person for the activity. Ask what the facility offers in the way of emergencies. Does the facility provide on-site medical personnel? If not, you may want to consider bringing a nurse or other medical professional with you. What other services are available? When selecting a site, take into consideration the various available services.

Establish criteria for the kind of chaperones you will need for your outing. Assess the type of activity your trip entails, the skills and abilities required, and the number of male and female students who will attend. Answering these questions will give you an idea of what kind of chaperones you will need for your trip.

For example, chaperones for a canoe trip should be comfortable in the water and an outdoor setting. Mission trips involving physical labor should have chaperones comfortable with being on their feet and engaging in physical activity for extended periods of time. Additionally, if your group has a higher number of males than females then you would need more male chaperones than female chaperones, and vice versa.

Lastly, create an emergency plan for your outing and plan for other non-emergency situations. If you don't know how to organize such a project, refer to [ARM's Emergency Planning page](#) to help you get started. No emergency plan is going to account for every contingency, but if you have no plan in an emergency situation, you will likely lose time, which can be critical.

In training your chaperones, review these supervision do's and don'ts:

- Do pay attention. Constant observation is necessary, always be watching.
- Do bond with the youth. Your kids should not be afraid of you. Building a bond is essential for children to feel comfortable to approach staff members with any problems.
- Do address problems and report them. If a child is missing or an accident has occurred, immediately respond to the incident. Your emergency plan should cover this.
- Do know the emergency plan. Calling 911 is not an emergency plan. Review what each chaperone should do in an emergency situation. Equip each chaperone with the contact information for the leader as well as all the other chaperones. Additionally, each chaperone should have the contact information for each child (if applicable).
- Don't view the trip as a vacation. While it is okay to enjoy the trip, you are there to work. Enjoyment is only secondary to your primary purpose. Remember that you are there to make sure those in your charge are cared for and are safe.
- Don't be unfamiliar with your group. You want to know how many people you are in charge of and who they are as well. This is another reason why bonding is important. Get to know your kids, their ages, and any special needs they may have.
- Don't forget about medical needs. This is a crucial part of making sure your trip ends successfully and safely. Know the specific medical needs of each child, any prescription medications they take, and if these medications need special handling.
- Don't skip permission forms and medical disclosures. Every parent or guardian should be required to fill them out for each child. These will help you know what to do in the case of a medical emergency. Additionally, handing these forms to an EMT or other medical professionals can save precious seconds as they assess how to treat the child.

It Is Better to Be Prepared

Even if you as a leader do not know every small detail, it is best to take the initiative and train your chaperones. Tell them exactly what they should do as chaperones and how to react in an emergency situation. Provide them with an orientation and allow time to answer any questions. Have an emergency plan and contact list available. Establish a point person to which chaperones can look to for leadership whether in a crisis or a normal setting. Insist they become familiar with the emergency plan.

Preparation and awareness are the keys to having a successful trip. Supervisors are there for a purpose. Be sure you define the purpose and communicate it to the supervisors.

Learn more about supervision guidelines in [ARM's Youth Supervision Guidelines infosheet](#).

References

¹https://www.safekids.org/safetytips/field_age/big-kids-5%25E2%2580%25939-years/field_risks/playground

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