

Outdoor Play Areas

A licensee must provide each child in care with at least 6.0 m² of outdoor play area. To meet the Regulation requirements, outdoor play areas are ideally situated directly adjacent to the child care facility, (e.g. fenced playyard or fenced backyard). Licensing does occasionally receive a request from an applicant to use a play area away from a facility.

A play area away from a facility:

- Can pose increased risk to the health and safety of children in care.
- May not be approved by Licensing if there are health and safety risks to children.

If you propose to use an outdoor play area located off-site, your licensing officer will request that you submit an Off-Site Play Space Plan outlining how you will ensure the health, safety and well-being of children and meet legislative requirements. (Please see addendum for relevant legislation.)



The following questions will help support an applicant/licensee in developing an appropriate Off-Site Play Area Plan:

Travelling To and From the Play Area

- How far away from the daycare is the play area, and is the journey suitable for the ages and abilities of children in care?
- What forms of transportation will you use (e.g. strollers, wagons, car)?
- If children are to be transported by vehicle, are age-appropriate child safety seats available?
- If children are walking:
 - Is the route safe and is there a need to cross streets?
 - Are there marked crosswalks or is there a way to minimize the crossing of streets?
 - Are there sidewalks?

Ensuring Safety at the Play Area

- How are the limits of the play area shown clearly to children?
 - Can children enter unsafe areas such as ravines, retaining walls, roads, driveways, parking lots?
 - Are there any extra safety measures needed such as blocking off inappropriate equipment?
- How will you ensure that the playground equipment and surrounding area is safe at all times (e.g. free from animal feces, glass, garbage, exposed nails, rust etc.)?
- If equipment is being made available to children, is it suitable for the age and abilities of all the children in your care? (See attached Director of Licensing's Standard Of Practice for Safe Play Space.)

Staffing Levels / Supervision

- How will you ensure:
 - Adequate supervision going to and from the play area?
 - Adequate supervision at the play area?
 - Staff are able to see and move through the whole area utilized by children?
 - Active supervision (a combination of staying close, giving full attention, watching, and listening) at all times?
 - Adequate staff are present to respond to all potential needs of children including any injuries, toileting needs, etc.?
- If the play area is used by others, what is the plan to ensure the children in your care can be easily seen (e.g. will children wear pinnies or hats etc., as a way to distinguish them from others)?



Program of Activities

- How will you give children:
 - More than one outdoor play time each day?
 - Outdoor play when they need it?
 - Outdoor play times which are long enough for children to take part in meaningful activity?
 - Opportunities to develop large and small muscle skills when playing outside?
 - Opportunities to grow (socially, emotionally, creatively, cognitively and physically)?
 - Will the environment meet their changing needs and interests?

Other Health and Safety Considerations

- How will you make sure you have emergency equipment and information (e.g. cellular phone, first aid kit, emergency information and consent for each child)?
- Has a policy been developed to guide staff with regards to the use of an off-site play area?

Other Considerations

- When proposing an off-site playground, have you discussed the use of this playground with the agency that is the owner of the property (e.g. municipality, school, strata complex or other agency).
- How will you make sure children can use a bathroom, if needed, while at the off-site play area?
- How will you let parents know about the off-site play area plan?

Next Steps

Information Required

You will need to submit the following to your local Licensing Officer:

- A plan showing the route to the off-site play area (including distance information and any major features which increase risk, e.g. roads, bodies of water, etc.)
- A site plan showing off-site play area(s).
- Any policies and procedures intended to guide staff with regards to using the proposed off-site play area.

Assessment Process

Your geographical Licensing Officer will review your proposal to determine if the increased risk posted to children is appropriately addressed. As part of the assessment process, your Licensing Officer will ask to accompany you to the proposed play space to conduct an inspection.

Director of Licensing Standards of Practice - Safe Play Space

Play Space Design

- The licensee must ensure that enough shade is provided to protect children from sunburn and sunstroke.
- The licensee must ensure that any equipment provided is placed to reduce direct exposure to sun. Equipment such as slides may become too hot to use during certain times of the day if they are sited poorly
- For the prevention of entrapment, spaces (e.g. holes or openings) must be smaller than 9 cm (3.5 inches) or larger than 23 cm (9 inches).
- Structures that incorporate stairs, landings, ladders, tunnels, bridges, etc. must have appropriate and secure safety barriers, guardrails and railings.

Materials and Equipment

- Staff must be educated regarding the correct use of equipment. Manufacturer's instructions must be followed to ensure safety.
- Equipment for toddlers must be no more than .9 meters (three feet) in height.
- Equipment for preschool children must be no more than 1.5 meters (5 feet) in height.
- Equipment for school-age children must be no more than 2.3 meters (7 feet) in height.

Ground Surfacing

- Equipment must not be installed over concrete, asphalt or other hard surfaces.
- Any protective surfacing used must be checked regularly to ensure the depth and adequacy of the material.
- The playground surface must be free of standing water and debris, such as poorly placed rocks, tree stumps, and tree roots that could cause a child to trip and fall.

Maintenance of Equipment

- Thorough daily, monthly and annual inspection programs must be performed regularly. If needed repairs/replacement cannot be made immediately, equipment must be removed from service until repaired or the licensee must ensure that additional safety precautions are put into action. Checklists will assist in reminding staff of the types of checks to be performed and in ensuring that proper maintenance and repair are completed.
 - Daily: check the play space for garbage, broken glass, animal feces and other hazardous items. This is especially important if the play space is located in an area to which the public has access, such as parks or schools.
 - Monthly: check the play space in greater detail, including a check of the landscaping and fencing and overall condition of equipment to ensure that they do not pose any hazards to children.
 - Annually: conduct a detailed audit of the play space, landscaping and all equipment.
- Keep a log of all inspections, maintenance and repairs.