

Excursions and routine outings

Practice Note 14 | May 2010

Excursions and routine outings occur when the children are taken outside the premises of a licensed children's service, family day care residence or family day care venue. These events fall into two categories: excursions and routine outings.

Excursions are outings that occur from time to time, such as a trip to the zoo.

Routine outings are excursions which are conducted on a regular basis such as a weekly trip to the library.

Considerations for excursions and routine outings

While excursions and routine outings may provide valuable experiences for the children, services must be mindful of the additional risks that may be present and the need to keep children safe from hazards and harm.

While the *Children's Services Regulations 2009* (Regulations) outline specific requirements for taking children on excursions and routine outings, the requirements of the *Children's Services Act 1996* (Act) must have primary consideration.

In particular the Act requires the service to take adequate precautions to protect children from harm and any hazard likely to cause injury (section 26), that the service provides adequate supervision of children (section 27), that staff/child ratios are met (section 29A) and that the educational or recreational program is made available to the children (section 26B).

The Regulations prescribe that a risk assessment must be undertaken before a staff member or family day carer takes a child outside the premises or family day care residence or family day care venue (regulation 74). Staff members and family day carers must have written authorisation from parents or guardians to take children outside the premises, family day care residence or family day care venue (regulation 73).

Further, the Regulations require that staff take certain things with them on an excursion or routine outing such as a first aid kit and a mobile phone (regulation 74(4)) and require that children have access to food, water, toilet and washing facilities (regulations 79, 80 and 101).

Each of these considerations are discussed in this practice note.

Risk assessment

The Regulations require a risk assessment to be undertaken to determine whether there is adequate adult supervision during an excursion or a routine outing in order to keep the children safe from hazards and harm (regulations 74(1), 74(2) and 74(3)).

What is a risk assessment?

A risk assessment is the process a service undertakes to identify risk of injury or harm associated with taking a child outside a licensed premises, family day care residence or family day care venue. A risk assessment includes identifying and addressing the risks.

When taking children outside a children's service, a family day carer's residence or family day care venue, every aspect of the environment must be considered at each stage of the excursion or routine outing to make sure that risks have been identified and addressed.

What is the purpose of conducting a risk assessment?

The purpose of a risk assessment is to make excursions and routine outings as safe as possible and to ensure that there is adequate adult supervision.

It is the responsibility of the service to ensure that all children being cared for or educated by the service are adequately supervised at all times the children are in the care of that service (section 27).

Suggested steps for planning an excursion or routine outing which includes a risk assessment are found on page 3 of this practice note.

Consideration of numbers of adults and adequate supervision

Identifying risks of harm to children must be done before an excursion or routine outing so that these risks can be minimised or avoided. All routine outings and excursions must be conducted in a way that ensures the safety and wellbeing of children. This means that an adequate number of staff members or family day carers and where necessary, other adults, accompany the children.

Generally staff/child ratios that are higher than the prescribed ratios will be required to ensure adequate supervision.

When taking children on an excursion or routine outing the

mix of adults accompanying the children must be carefully considered. For any excursion or routine outing staff members or family day carers will usually have other staff members and/or other adults with them to ensure that adequate supervision of the children is maintained.

Consideration must also be given to the number of staff members or family day carers who have first aid training so that there are enough staff members and family day carers attending the excursion or routine outing who can respond to any emergency that may arise.

Family day care

When a family day carer takes the children outside the family day care residence or family day care venue for an excursion or routine outing all of the children being cared for or educated by the family day carer must accompany the family day carer. Children being cared for or educated by the family day care service must not be left in the care of another adult. This is because at any one time only one family day carer from any one residence or venue may provide care or education for the children (regulation 14(5)).

Supervision of adults

Supervision is not confined to the children. It also includes the supervision of the adults.

The number of experienced and qualified staff and family day carers must be adequate to supervise any volunteers who are present.

Any volunteer who does not hold an assessment notice must be supervised by the proprietor or a qualified staff member (regulation 70(5)(b)). For further information on volunteers refer to the fact sheet *Volunteers in licensed children's services*.

Authorisation for removal of a child

When a staff member or family day carer takes a child outside the premises, the family day carer's residence or family day care venue, the proprietor must ensure that the parent or guardian provides written authorisation (regulations 73(1) and 73(2)).

The authorisation must state:

- the reason the child is to be taken outside the premises
- the date the child is to be taken on the excursion
- the proposed destination for the excursion
- the method of transport to be used for the excursion
- the proposed activities to be undertaken by the child during the excursion
- the period the child will be away from the premises
- the number of staff members, family day carers, and any other responsible person who will accompany and supervise the child on the excursion (regulation 73(2)).

Authorisation for routine outings

A staff member or a family day carer may take a child on a routine outing if written authorisation has been given by

the child's parent or guardian within the previous 12 months (regulation 73(3)). However obtaining authorisation more regularly would be advisable. Authorisations are also required for the regular practice fire drills done pursuant to regulation 76 as they will generally involve children leaving the premises.

Authorisations for routine outings must be distinguished from those required for excursions. A separate risk assessment is required for each excursion prior to the excursion taking place.

Authorisation may be given by a parent or guardian or other person named in the child's enrolment record as having lawful authority to authorise the taking of the child outside the premises, family day care residence or family day care venue by a staff member or family day carer.

Routine outings

Family day care and routine outings

Family day carers frequently take children out of the family day care residence or family day care venue. Instances such as taking children to school, shopping, going to playgroup, to the park and other day-to-day outings are considered routine outings.

Family day carers must conduct general risk assessments for these regular outings.

Notice to be displayed on routine outing

If a staff member takes a child on a routine outing, services must also display a notice that -

- indicates the children who attend the service are on a routine outing
- states the location of the routine outing
- states the time the children are expected to return to the service's premises (regulation 73(3)(b)).

As a parent or guardian may have given authorisation for the routine outing several months prior to any particular outing, this notice will remind them that their children are on a routine outing.

Family day care services are not required to display the notice referred to above when the children are participating in a routine outing.

Educational or recreational program

A children's program must be offered to the children at all times they are being cared for or educated by the service whether it be at the usual location the service is provided or outside the premises, family day care residence or family day care venue.

When planning an excursion or routine outing, staff members and family day carers must consider how this outing supports the educational or recreational program for the children (section 26B).

Toilet, washing facilities, food and beverage requirements

When planning for an excursion or routine outing consideration must be given to how long the children will be away from the premises, family day care residence or family day care venue. If toileting or nappy changing facilities will be required, staff members and family day carers must ensure that these are available and are appropriate for the children (regulation 101).

Staff members and family day carers must ensure that there is water available for the children to drink and, if necessary, food and beverages are made available during the excursion or routine outing (regulations 79 and 80).

What must be taken on a routine outing or an excursion

If a child is taken by a staff member or family day carer outside the premises, family day care residence or family day care venue, the proprietor of the service must ensure a staff member or family day carer accompanying the child carries as a minimum:

- a suitably equipped first aid kit
- the telephone number of any person who is to be notified of any accident, injury, trauma or illness involving the child and the child's registered medical practitioner or medical service.
- an operational mobile telephone with an appropriate connection to a mobile telephone network
- if the child has been diagnosed as at risk of anaphylaxis, the child's anaphylaxis medication and anaphylaxis medical management plan (regulation 74 (4)).

Staff members and family day carers must plan for and anticipate other requirements which need to be met for particular children on an excursion or routine outing.

This may include medication for children where applicable such as asthma, diabetes or anaphylaxis medication and other items such as sunscreen, hats, food and water.

Planning for an excursion or routine outing

Factors to be taken into account when planning an

excursion or routine outing include: the educational or recreational program, the children's behaviour and any health or medical needs, the age of the children, the length of the outing, the abilities of the children, crossing roads and traffic, method of transport, any contact with water, leaving the service, arriving at the family day care venue, accidents, toileting and nappy changing arrangements. Most important is thinking about supervision at all times.

The degree of planning required is influenced by the nature of the routine outing or excursion, the level of risk and the children who are participating. For excursions and routine outings that have previously been planned and conducted, previous risk assessments may need to be reviewed and revised.

Developing a plan for an excursion or routine outing which includes a risk assessment

There is no right or wrong way to develop a plan for an excursion or a routine outing that includes a risk assessment. You will need to develop one that works for you and your service. Suggested steps in planning an excursion or routine outing and completing a risk assessment are listed below.

State the purpose of the routine outing or excursion

Identify how the excursion or routine outing fits into the educational or recreational program for the children.

Note the length of the excursion or routine outing

Indicate how long the children will be away from the service, family day care residence or family day care venue and any considerations relating to the length of the excursion or routine outing.

List the activities of the excursion or routine outing

List the activities of the excursion or outing, breaking it down into parts. For example, leaving the service, family day care residence or family day care venue, travelling to the location, the environment at the location, each activity that will be done at the location and returning to the premises, family day care residence or venue.

Identify the risks and hazards (section 26)

Identify what risks, hazards and other considerations may be present for each stage of the excursion or routine outing. Be mindful of issues including the method of travel, the family day care venue, any equipment that will be used, the environment and the behaviour of the children. This may involve staff or family day carers going to the location before the excursion or routine outing to identify and assess any hazards and risks.

Evaluate the level of risk and decide on precautions

Once you have identified the risks, you will need to categorise the risks as high, medium or low. You then need

to decide how to manage each risk. You may be able to remove a risk altogether or reduce the children's exposure to the risk. Determining the number of adults that will be needed to supervise the children will be a large factor in managing the risk.

Remember that many potential risks can be overcome by increasing the number of adults accompanying and supervising the children.

Occasionally, after completing a risk assessment, you may decide the risks for the children are too high to undertake the excursion or routine outing.

Consider how the educational outcomes for the children may be achieved in other ways.

In some circumstances the same outcomes may be achieved by a special event at the service premises, for example if the desired outcome is for the children to become more familiar with animals, you could organise for a mobile farm to visit the service instead.

Record your findings

Document what you have found and what you intend to do about each of the risks that you have identified. (Section 26 of the Act requires that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children being cared for or educated by the service from harm and from any hazard likely to cause injury).

Implement any plans you have to reduce or remove the risk

If it is possible to remove or reduce any risks or hazards do this before the excursion or routine outing.

Communicate your plans

Communicate your plans to all staff or other carers and any other adults going on the excursion or routine outing and to parents and guardians of the children involved.

Monitor and review your plans

Always check that your plans are effective and monitor them and revise as necessary during the excursion or routine outing.

Review your plans after the excursion or routine outing and modify them for the next time

Spend some time after the excursion or routine outing thinking about what happened and talking with other staff. Some things to consider are: how safe the environment was for the children, how well supervised the children were and how the children participated and benefited in the activities provided. If needed, make modifications so that they can be used on the next excursion or routine outing to the same location.

Related practice notes and fact sheets

- Supervision practice note
- Behaviour management practice notes
- Emergency procedures practice note

- Children's programs overview practice note
- Criminal history check practice note
- Volunteer fact sheet
- Staff members fact sheet

Fact sheets and practice notes are available online at:

www.education.vic.gov.au/licensedchildservices

Further information

The Department of Education and Training is the Regulatory Authority in Victoria.

Phone: 1300 307 415

Email: licensed.childrens.services@edumail.vic.gov.au

www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation