



Connecticut Nurses Association (CT Nurses) Family Child Care Policy & Procedure Guidance Series (2021)

Topic: Outdoor Play

Table of Contents

1. How to Use this Guide
2. Overview
3. Policy Checklist
4. Resources/References
5. Sample Policies

The **Connecticut Nurses Association Family Child Care Policy & Procedure Guidance Series (2021) (Guidance Series)** was created to support Family Child Care (FCC) Providers when establishing or building upon health and safety policies in response to the COVID 19 pandemic. The 2021 **Guidance Series** provides best practice considerations/components, sample language and rationale, so that FCC providers can evaluate their own policies, procedures, practices, and family communications and then identify changes or additions essential to promoting health and safety in their homes. The 2021 **Guidance Series** is based on the latest guidance, practices, or recommendations from the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC), Caring for Our Children (CFOC) National Health and Safety Standards and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

1. HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The **Connecticut Nurses Association (CT Nurses) Policy & Procedure Guidance Series** (2021) is a resource for FCC providers. Using research informed and evidence-based practices, the **Guidance Series** provides information to assist FCC providers in creating or strengthening their childcare policies, procedures, or practices. Additionally, the **Guidance Series** provides rationale, and answers “why” the information provided is an important component of the policy, procedure, or practice. In understanding ‘why’, we hope that FCC providers will apply this information when making decisions about how activities will be implemented in their FCC homes.

The **Guidance Series** documents are organized as follows

- Overview
 - Provides a brief description of the specific topic being addressed.
- Policy Checklist
 - This section provides a comprehensive Checklist to assist in the development of, or build upon current policies, procedures, and best practices for FCC programs. The Checklist identifies best practice components/considerations, includes sample language and rationale so that FCC providers can evaluate their own policies, procedures, practices. The Checklist is based on the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) Guidance, the Caring for Our Children (CFOC) National Health and Safety Standards and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.)
- Resources/References
 - This section includes best practice resources and references.
- Sample Policies/Procedures
 - Select policies and practices are provided in this section.

2. OVERVIEW

Outdoor play is important for young children as it offers them important health and developmental [benefits](#). Young children are more likely to engage in the kinds of vigorous, physical play that strengthens their hearts, lungs, and muscles because they tend to play harder and for longer periods of time when they are outside. Infants and toddlers benefit from spending time outdoors as well. Regularly spending time outdoors increases opportunities to practice crawling, toddling, walking, climbing, and running freely. In addition to improving large motor skills, vigorous physical activity improves children's overall fitness level ([ECLKC](#), 2019). Outdoor play and exploration [strengthens children's learning](#). Playing outside helps to increase creativity, imagination, as well as social interactions between children. To support these healthy benefits, it is important that FCC providers put in place policies and processes to support safe outdoor play. These policies and processes should include: 1) active supervision; 2) health, first aid and medication administration; 3) monitoring for safe weather-related conditions; 4) considerations for creating safe and stimulating outdoor play spaces; and 5) inspection of outdoor play areas and equipment.

1. Active Supervision

Active supervision is a strategy that helps to ensure safety and positive play experiences by children. Since children should never be left unattended, active supervision by FCC providers requires focused attention and intentional observation. Strategies to actively supervise children while they are outdoors includes

- Placing yourself so you can see and hear all the children.
- Watching, counting, and listening at all times.
- Setting up the outdoor play environment so that allows you to supervise by sight and sound.

2. Health, first aid and medication administration

Outdoor environments can provide children with wonderful opportunities to engage with nature. Learning about insects, plants, animals, and other interesting things in nature can also present challenges, especially for those children who may be allergic to them. In cases of accidents or injuries, such as falling or being stung by an insect, FCC providers should ensure that they are familiar with each child's health concerns so that they can respond in a safe, effective, and efficient manner. In Connecticut, FCC providers are required to maintain a current certification in First Aid for Daycare, and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). During outdoor play, First Aid Kits, and emergency medications (such as EpiPens) should always be readily available and kept out of reach of children.

It is important that FCC providers communicate with families about outdoor play policies and processes, so that they can provide any over the counter or prescribed medications, ointments, etc., for use on, or to be given to children (for example, sunscreen lotions, EpiPens, Inhalers, etc).

3. Monitoring for safe weather-related conditions

FCC providers should monitor weather-related conditions and adjust outdoor time accordingly to protect children from harm caused by adverse weather. Use a tool, such as the [Child Care Weather Watch](#) to guide your adjustments, and ensure that children wear appropriate clothing and/or appropriate shelter is provided for the weather conditions. Weather that poses a significant health risk includes wind chill factor below -15°F (-26°C) and heat index at or above 90°F (32°C), as identified by the [National Weather Service](#). Monitoring air quality is also important. Information about air quality can be found at <https://www.airnow.gov>.

4. Considerations for Creating Safe and Stimulating Outdoor Play Spaces

Outdoor learning environments include age-appropriate equipment, materials, supplies, and physical space. Safe outdoor play spaces for children requires careful planning and monitoring. Understanding that children of different ages have different developmental needs and abilities, FCC providers should ensure that there is a variety of outdoor play equipment so everyone can have fun, while being safe. Some general safety guidelines include

- “Covering sand boxes when not in use so animals will not use them as a litter box.
- Providing some shade in the play space, either from natural sources like trees or from a tent, awning, or other shelter.
- Placing metal playground equipment, such as platforms and slides, in the shade to prevent burns.
- Placing equipment that has moving parts, such as swings, on the outside of the play area and teach children to stay away from the front and back of the swing area.
- Never attaching any ropes or cords to play equipment.
- Safely anchoring to the ground permanent outdoor equipment such as swing sets or climbers.
- Being sure that all outdoor play areas are fenced, especially near a street, parking lot, pond, well, or railroad track.
- Surrounding electrical appliances in the play area, such as air conditioners, with fences so children cannot reach them.
- Removing gas grills from outdoor play areas.
- Keeping gates closed and install childproof latches.
- Locking storage sheds, barns, and garages” ([Childcare, 2021](#)).

5. Inspection of Outdoor Play Areas, Surfaces, and Equipment

- **Play Areas:** When providing children with safe opportunities for active outdoor play and nature exploration, it is important that FCC providers inspect outdoor play areas, equipment, surfaces, and toys, before they are used by children. When regular inspection of surface and play equipment results in identification of broken, worn, or missing parts, FCC providers must remove, repair, or replace items immediately.
- **Surfaces and Equipment:** Falls are the number one cause of injuries for children and outdoor play spaces, or playgrounds are included in the places where they occur. In addition to active supervision, and proper spacing, the [National Recreation and Park Association](#) recommends that “the surface or ground under and around age-appropriate structures and equipment are soft enough to cushion a fall.” Improper surfacing material under playground equipment is the leading cause of playground-related injuries. Therefore, FCC providers should incorporate age-appropriate structures, with shock absorbing surfacing in their safe planning for outdoor play. FCC providers must also ensure that equipment and structures are properly installed initially, and then maintained on a regular basis.

Important Note:

During COVID-19, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) provided some general (for example, mask wearing and physical distancing) and cleaning [Guidance](#) for family child care (FCC) providers for outdoor play. This information is found in the [Guidance for Family Child Care Homes: During COVID-19](#).

3. POLICY CHECKLIST

CONSIDERATIONS		
Items	Sample Language	Regulations/Rationale
Outdoor Play Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We go outside every day to play (weather permitting) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the mornings between ___am and ___ am In the afternoon between ___ pm and ___ pm 	<p>Flexible and Balanced Schedule: FCC Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provider shall develop and implement a written schedule that is flexible, with time for free choice play, outdoor play, snacks, meals and a rest period.
Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are always supervised during outdoor play, as well as during our transitions to and from the outdoors. 	<p>Supervision: FCC Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervision means guidance of the children’s behavior and activities to insure their health, safety, and wellbeing. It is done by a provider who is within effective sight or sound of the children. Monitoring devices shall not replace supervision by the provider. Family child care providers are responsible for the supervision of the children at all times, indoors, outdoors, and on excursions. The provider shall be either indoors or outdoors with all children in care unless an approved staff is present to provide supervision.
Health: First Aid and Medications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All staff at our FCC are certified in First Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) During outdoor play, First Aid Kits and emergency medications (such as EpiPens) are always readily available and kept out of reach of children. Families must provide all over the counter or prescribed medications, ointments, etc., for use on or to be given to child(ren) (for example, sunscreen lotions, EpiPens, Inhalers, etc). Please refer to our medication administration policy. 	<p>First Aid Supplies: FCC Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provider shall have at least one portable, readily accessible first aid kit whenever children are in care, including during field trips. Each kit shall be a closed container for storing first aid supplies, accessible to the provider...at all times but out of the reach of children. First aid kits shall be restocked after use. The first aid kit shall contain at least the following first aid supplies <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Assorted sizes of non-medicated adhesive strips; Sterile, individually wrapped, three or four inch gauze squares; A two inch gauze roller bandage; One roll of hypoallergenic adhesive tape; Scissors; Tweezers; Two instant cold packs; A non-glass thermometer to measure a child’s temperature; Disposable, nonporous gloves; and Cardiopulmonary resuscitation mouth barrier. <p>First Aid Supplies for Field Trips</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to the First Aid Supplies requirements, for field trips the first aid kit shall also include the following first aid supplies <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Water; Reliable communication device; Liquid soap; Emergency contact numbers for each child; Any medication and items needed for the administration of medication, if the family child care home engages in the administration of medication...; and Plastic bags, for storage.
Weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time outdoors will be adjusted due to extreme hot or cold 	<p>CFOC: 3.1.3.2: Playing Outdoors</p>

		<p>temperatures, thunderstorms, blizzards, lightening, threatening weather, air quality, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children will not be taken outside when the temperature is below ___ degrees or rise above ___ degrees. • Indoor play will be provided whenever outdoor play is not provided. • Please send additional, appropriate outdoor clothing with your child(ren) every day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children should play outdoors when the conditions do not pose any concerns for health and safety such as a significant risk of frostbite or heat-related illness. Caregivers/teachers must protect children from harm caused by adverse weather, ensuring that children wear appropriate clothing and/or appropriate shelter is provided for the weather conditions. Weather that poses a significant health risk includes wind chill factor below -15°F (-26°C) and heat index at or above 90°F (32°C), as identified by the National Weather Service (NWS). • FCC providers can check for weather conditions through local media outlets, including local e-mail and text messaging weather alerts. • The National Weather Service (NWS) provides up-to-date weather information on all advisories and warnings. It also provides safety tips for caregivers/teachers to use as a tool in determining when weather conditions are comfortable for outdoor play (www.nws.noaa.gov/om/heat/index.shtml).
	<p>Outdoor play space</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All outdoor play spaces are enclosed and inspected daily for basic health and safety. • The location of our outdoor play space includes the ___ Back yard ___ Front yard ___ Side of the house ___ Other _____ 	<p>Outdoor play space: FCC Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There must be sufficient indoor and outdoor play space to ensure appropriate activities, safety, and comfort for the children at the facility. • When outdoor play space does not exist at the facility, the provider shall identify alternate outdoor play space and develop a written plan that ensures the safe transportation of children to and from the alternate outdoor play space. • The outdoor play space shall be protected from traffic, bodies of water, gullies, and other hazards by barriers that bar access to such hazards and are safe for children.
	<p>Outdoor Activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor activities at our Family Child Care includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Playscape ○ Playhouse ○ Water Play ○ Sandboxes ○ Swings ○ Garden ○ Other _____ • Play equipment and protective surfacing have been appropriately chosen and properly installed, so that all children in our care can have opportunities to safely play outside. 	<p>Bodies of Water for Play: FCC Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When there is a swimming pool or any other body of water at the facility or near enough to the facility to attract or be accessible to children at any time of the year, there shall be a sturdy fence or barrier, four feet high or higher, which totally and effectively bars access to the water by the children. • All entries and exits through such fence or barrier shall have self-closing, self-latching devices or locks. • When an outside wall of the facility that serves as one side of the fence or barrier to the body of water has a doorway, such doorway shall remain locked. • Shallow wading pools that are not fenced shall be emptied after each use and shall not collect water. • Decorative ponds, fish ponds, fountains or similar bodies of water that do not have a fence or barrier, must be completely covered with a childproofing gate or other barrier to prevent access to children. • No child in care shall be permitted in a hot tub, spa or sauna. <p>Sufficient Play Equipment: FCC Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There shall be a sufficient quantity and variety of indoor and outdoor equipment which is appropriate to the needs of the children, their developmental levels and interests and is available for their use. • There shall be equipment that encourages large and fine muscle activity, solitary and group play and quiet play.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All manufacturer guidelines shall be followed for furniture, equipment and any toy that is accessible to children. • Any furniture, equipment or toy that has been identified by the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission as unsafe or subject to recall shall be removed from the facility or repaired as indicated.
	<p>Inspection of Outdoor Play Spaces, Surfaces, Equipment</p>	<p>We conduct health and safety inspection of the following before they are used by our children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play spaces • Surfaces • Equipment 	<p>Outdoor play space: FCC Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There must be sufficient indoor and outdoor play space to ensure appropriate activities, safety, and comfort for the children at the facility. • When outdoor play space does not exist at the facility, the provider shall identify alternate outdoor play space and develop a written plan that ensures the safe transportation of children to and from the alternate outdoor play space. • The outdoor play space shall be protected from traffic, bodies of water, gullies, and other hazards by barriers that bar access to such hazards and are safe for children.

Important Note:
During COVID-19, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) provided some general (for example, mask wearing and physical distancing) and cleaning [Guidance](#) for family child care (FCC) providers for outdoor play. This information is found in the [Guidance for Family Child Care Homes: During COVID-19](#). FCC providers should consider updating their outdoor play policy and processes to include these requirements and recommendations.

4. RESOURCES/REFERENCES:

Caring for Our Children (CFOC)

- National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education
<https://nrckids.org/>
- Benefits of Outdoor Play and Exploration
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/learning-environments/supporting-outdoor-play-exploration-infants-toddlers/benefits-outdoor-play-exploration>
- Playing Outdoors
<https://nrckids.org/CFOC/Database/3.1.3.2>

Childcare

- Basic Tips to Keep Children in Child Care Safe Outdoors
<https://childcare.extension.org/basic-tips-to-keep-children-in-child-care-safe-outdoors/Connecticut Office of Early Childhood>

Connecticut Office of Early Childhood

- Guidance for Family Child Care Homes During COVID-19
[OEC FamilyChildCareHomesGuide C12V1-S \(ctoec.org\)](https://www.ctoec.org/OEC_FamilyChildCareHomesGuide_C12V1-S_(ctoec.org))
- Proposed State of Connecticut Regulations of Office of Early Childhood Concerning Family Child Care Homes
https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WATERMARK-Proposed_Regulation_PR2017-046-2.24.21.pdf
- Watch our webinar: warm attitudes about cold play
<https://www.ctoec.org/news/watch-our-webinar-warm-attitudes-about-cold-play/>

National Program for Playground Safety

- S.A.F.E. Framework for Playground Safety
<https://www.playgroundsafety.org/safe/framework>
- Supervision
<https://www.playgroundsafety.org/safe-resources/supervision>

National Recreation and Park Association

- Playground Safety: It's Not Just for Kids
https://www.zeager.com/content/uploads/2015/12/DirtyDozen_Final.pdf

National Weather Service

- www.nws.noaa.gov/om/heat/index.shtml

5. SAMPLE POLICIES/PROCEDURES

Sample Outdoor Play Policy

Our Family Child Care understands that outdoor play is important for young children as it offers them important health and developmental benefits. As such, we plan for and engage in deliberate outdoor play and exploration for all children in our care.

- We go outside every day to play (weather permitting): In the mornings between ___ am and ___ am; and again in the afternoon between ___ pm and ___ pm.
- Time outdoors will be adjusted due to extreme hot or cold temperatures, thunderstorms, blizzards, lightening, threatening weather, etc. Additionally, children will not be taken outside when the temperature is below ___ degrees or rise above ___ degrees. Indoor play will be provided whenever outdoor play is not provided.
- Please remember to send appropriate outdoor clothing with your child(ren) every day, so that they can safely enjoy the outdoors.
- Children are always supervised by an adult during outdoor play, as well as during our transitions to and from the outdoors.
- All staff at our FCC maintain current certification in First Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR).
- During outdoor play, First Aid Kits, and emergency medications (such as EpiPens) are always readily available and kept out of reach of children.
- Families must provide all over the counter or prescribed medications, ointments, etc., for use on or to be given to child(ren) (for example, sunscreen lotions, EpiPens, Inhalers, etc). Please refer to our medication administration policy.
- All of our outdoor play spaces are enclosed and inspected daily for basic health and safety. The location of our outdoor play space includes: [**Specify Here**].
- The outdoor activities at our Family Child Care includes: [**Specify Here**]
- Play equipment and protective surfacing have been appropriately chosen so that all children in our care can have opportunities to play and explore the outdoors.
- We conduct health and safety inspection of play spaces, surfaces, and equipment before they are used by our children.
- During COVID-19, our FCC adheres to the current Office of Early Childhood health and other requirements, including mask wearing by children, families and staff, physical distancing, cleaning, and other requirements.

Parent/Guardian/Staff/Name and Signature

Date

Disclaimer: This is a Sample Policy/Procedure only and may not include all the requirements for FCC provisions as outlined in the OEC Regulations.