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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees and Delegate Agencies

SUBJECT: Supervision and Transitions

INFORMATION:

The Office of Head Start (OHS) asks all Head Start and Early Head Start program leaders to remind staff to prioritize children's safety by providing continuous supervision. Governing bodies, Tribal Councils, Policy Councils, directors, and managers must create a culture of safety within their programs. Everyone shares responsibility for keeping children safe. Grantee staff must ensure that "no child will be left alone or unsupervised while under their care" (45 CFR1304.52 (i)(1)(iii)).

OHS has received reports about children being left unsupervised inside and outside of Head Start programs, as well as on playgrounds and buses. These incidents are a grave concern for programs, OHS, and the families who entrust their children to Head Start care. Leaving children unsupervised increases the risk of serious injuries and emotional distress. Children who leave the Head Start facility alone may be exposed to further danger.

At the regional level, OHS responds to these incidents by contacting the grantee to gather information regarding the context, circumstances, and follow-up actions, including whether the incident has been reported to the appropriate licensing entity. Regional Offices also request copies of relevant documentation, such as communication with the family of the child or children involved, licensing reports and investigations where applicable, written procedures and related training records, and actions taken by the program in response to the incident.

On the local level, OHS recommends that each grantee's governing body (the Tribal Council in Region XI) and Policy Council work with program management to develop and communicate an agency-wide child supervision plan. The plan should build a culture of safety by ensuring that each person understands his or her role in keeping all enrolled children safe, and that child-to-staff ratios are maintained at all times.

Active supervision is a set of strategies for supervising infants, toddlers, and preschool children in the following areas: grantee, delegate, and partner classrooms; field trips and socializations; family child care homes; and on playgrounds and school buses. Grantees should include action steps to implement each active supervision strategy in their child supervision plans. These six strategies work together to create an effective approach to child supervision.

1. Set up the environment to supervise children at all times. This may include developing and posting a daily classroom schedule for children, teachers, substitutes, and volunteers to follow that helps to keep the day predictable. The height and arrangement of classroom furniture and outdoor equipment should be considered to allow effective monitoring and supervision of children at all times.
2. Position staff to see and reach children at all times. Plans can include staffing charts that identify the teacher responsible for each area or activity and his or her duties during transitions before and after an activity.
3. Scan the environment, including assigned areas of the classroom or outdoor area, and count the children. Staff need to communicate with each other so everyone knows where each child is and what each one is doing. This is especially important in play areas and on the playground when children are constantly moving.
4. Listen closely to children and the environment to identify signs of potential danger immediately. Listen to and talk with team members, especially when a staff person or a child has to leave the area, so that staff knows where other staff are located.
5. Anticipate children's behavior to give children any needed additional support, especially at the start of the school year and during transitions. Children who wander off or lag behind are more likely to be left unsupervised.
6. Engage and redirect when children are unable to solve problems on their own. Offer different levels of assistance according to each individual child's needs.

Transitions are often the most challenging times to supervise children. To prevent children from being left unsupervised, program plans should include specific strategies for managing transitions throughout the day, such as when children arrive, leave, or move from one location to another within a center. Some examples may include:

- Develop specific plans for regular routines, such as drop-off and pick-up times, including staff assignments (who will monitor the door, etc.).
- Ensure teachers, teachers' aides, and volunteers know when transitions will take place and are in position to provide constant supervision.
- Discuss how the team will adjust to maintain appropriate adult-to-child ratios at all times, including when a teacher needs to leave the room.
- Ensure parents understand their responsibilities during drop-off and pick-up of their child, and be alert to and communicate potential child wanderings as needed.
- Limit the amount of time children are waiting in line to transition.
- Reaffirm to children what adults expect during transitions.
- Include plans for irregular times, such as when a center closes early due to weather or an outside door is open to allow the delivery of supplies.

Programs should report incidents of unsupervised children to the Regional Office of Head Start within three days of the incident, including, where applicable, any reports made or information shared with child welfare agencies, state licensing bodies, and parents. Regional Offices will provide technical assistance, as appropriate.

Programs are busy, active places. Head Start grantees that develop and use child supervision plans include roles for everyone to create a culture of safety where children can learn and grow.

Please contact your Office of Head Start Regional Office for more information on child safety, active supervision, and transitions.

/ Blanca E. Enriquez /

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Resources:

For more information on these strategies, check out the [Active Supervision](#) page on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC).

Programs can also refer to [ACF-IM-HS-14-04 Bus Transportation and Safety](#) and [ACF-IM-HS-09-06 Safety of Children](#).