Child Supervision on Transportation: Attention Management and Active Supervision on Head Start Buses

Head Start transportation teams have an important job. Not only do they have to make sure buses are safe and routes run on time, they also must supervise children on their bus. How a transportation team starts the morning and finishes the afternoon can set the tone for how a child feels about the rest of his or her day.

Children are safer when teams work together and communicate well. Each driver, monitor, and transportation manager has an important role. Together, they make sure that children get to and from programs safely. This fact sheet explores many of the issues teams are likely to face. It offers strategies to help team members work together to keep all of the children in their care safe.

Programs can use this tool to

- Identify and use attention management strategies. These skills will help bus monitors and drivers focus on their duties.

- Identify and use active supervision strategies. These skills will help bus monitors and drivers keep children safe on the bus.

- Think about systems—policies and procedures—to make sure that no child is left unattended.

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What Is Attention Management and How Can It Help You Focus on Your Duties and Responsibilities?

Attention is "the ability or power to concentrate; to observe or listen closely or carefully." Everyone has limits on how much he or she can pay attention at one time. It is easier to pay attention when there are no distractions. It can be hard to figure out how to stay focused when people are busy and have to pay attention to many things at the same time. Attention management is a way to help people stay focused by directing or controlling their attention. It helps you identify and limit distractions, set priorities, and stay focused.

Use the following questions to help you think about how to pay attention:

Identify and Limit Distractions

- What things distract me while I am on the bus?
- What do I need to do to deal with these distractions?

Set Priorities

- What are the most important things I do to keep children safe?
- What do I need to do to make sure that I always focus on these things?

Stay Focused

- How can I focus on more than one thing at the same time?
- What else can I or my team do to help me pay attention?

Bus drivers and monitors can use these questions to think about how to manage distractions and stay focused. This can help them to feel less stressed. Transportation teams that answer these questions together can develop attention management systems that focus on child safety. This can help them to do their job well. But staying focused is only the first step.

How Can Active Supervision Help You Supervise Children on Buses?

There are 6 key strategies that adults use to structure the environment. This is known as active supervision. Because children are seated in child passenger safety restraints and cannot move around the bus freely, the bus monitor has to be ready to recognize children's needs and respond quickly. Bus monitors can use active supervision strategies when children are boarding, exiting, and riding the bus.

The 6 key strategies for supervising children on buses are

Set Up the Environment

- Bus monitors set up the bus to keep a constant eye on what children are doing. They use reminders to help them check and double-check each seat on the bus. For example,
- A small object like a token is stuck underneath the last seat on the bus. The monitor or driver must collect it after finishing each route.
- A bus alarm system is used so that the bus driver has to walk to the back of the bus to turn it off. (See an example at www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6Cd9qVN0BY.)

Position Staff

Bus monitors carefully plan where they will sit on the bus. They choose a seat that allows them to watch children and respond when needed. For example,

- Bus monitors sit in the front and the back of the bus. If only one bus monitor is on the bus, he or she is seated in the middle.
- If possible, the ratio of monitors to children is the same as the ratio of teachers to children in the classroom.
- Bus monitors stay with the bus until an authorized adult picks up each child.

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Scan and Count

Bus monitors always know where all children are on the bus. They are always scanning and counting. For example,

- Bus monitors record attendance as children board and leave the bus. They may use written logs, tablet computers, or cell phones to log children in and out as they enter or exit the bus.

- An authorized adult signs off once all children are in his or her care at the program. This person could be the center director, teacher, or other staff member. Family members or other authorized adults also sign the attendance record when their child is dropped off.

- Bus monitors and drivers scan the bus to make sure all children have left the bus. They then check each seat on the bus at the end of every trip.

- Whenever possible, someone other than the driver or monitor checks the bus at the end of each shift.

- Transportation supervisors make frequent spot-checks. Other program managers or families sometimes check the bus after the route is finished. This is part of the program's ongoing monitoring system.

Listen

Bus monitors are always listening to children. They know which sounds are signs of danger. For example,

- Bus monitors are alert to unusual sounds or silence while riding the bus.

- Bus monitors can identify the causes of a wide range of sounds. Children may make sounds when they are upset about
  - Leaving a family member
  - Having a wet or dirty diaper
  - Being hungry
  - Arguing with other children
  - Having another immediate need

Anticipate Children's Behavior

Bus monitors get to know the children on their bus, including their interests and needs, which helps to predict what children will do. For example,

- Bus monitors build relationships with the children and their families. As much as possible, bus drivers and monitors have the same routes every day.

- Bus monitors do a quick check-in with the adult dropping the child off. Understanding each child helps monitors to know what to expect when a child is not feeling well or gets upset on the bus.

Engage and Redirect

Bus monitors help children who need support. They offer reminders and soothe children when they become upset and need help calming down. They also distract or refocus children when necessary. For example,

- When a child seems upset, bus monitors and adults responsible for picking up the child work together to help the child manage his or her feelings.

- Bus monitors observe and react quickly to children who need extra support on the bus. When possible, these children are seated close to the monitor.

When transportation teams use these strategies, children are more likely to ride the bus and arrive at their destination safely. Programs that use active supervision never leave children unattended.

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What Does Supervising on Buses Look Like?

The following story shows how one transportation team uses these strategies:

Monday morning, Marguerite and Ahmed begin their day by boarding bus 31 in the bus lot behind 1, 2, 3 Head Start.

Before they get started, Ahmed goes to the back of the bus and places white tokens on a Velcro spot underneath the last 2 seats. Then he moves to the middle rows and places tokens underneath those seats as well. These tokens will help remind him that he needs to check every seat at the end of each route.

When the team agrees that the bus is safe and ready to go, Ahmed grabs his clipboard with attendance sheets. There is a sheet for each route with the name of every child that rides the bus. It is arranged by bus stops.

Ahmed sits in a seat in the middle of the bus. He will seat the children from the front to the back so that he can observe the children safely and be close to them. When he is seated, Marguerite starts the bus and begins their first route of the day.

At each stop, Ahmed gets off of the bus and greets the parents or other authorized adults. They initial next to their child's name. Then Ahmed seats all of the children so that he can see and hear them.

As the bus is moving, Ahmed constantly scans the bus to see and listen to how the children are doing. Some children continue to sleep on the bus, while others sing songs and chatter with Ahmed. One child drops his mitten and starts to cry, but Ahmed reassures him that he will get it at the next stop. He sometimes moves to sit near a child who needs encouragement.

Ahmed knows that one child, Rosa, has just learned how to unbuckle herself. He seats her next to him and distracts her by chatting with her about what she did at home that morning. If necessary, he reminds her that all children have to keep the buckles fastened.

When the bus arrives at the program, Ahmed and Marguerite watch as some of the children's teachers and aides greet the bus. They conduct a last head count together and escort the children off the bus. As each child exits, one of the teachers initials next to his or her name on the clipboard. This provides a written check that each child has been delivered to the authorized adult. The teachers and aides then walk the children to their classrooms.

When all of the children have exited, Marguerite and Ahmed inspect the bus to make sure that all children got off and no one got back on. While they conduct this check, the center supervisor counts the children as they enter the building with their teachers. This is a way of double-checking the information on the clipboard.

When they are done with their inspection, Ahmed removes the tokens from the middle and back seats. He reviews the clipboard and he and Marguerite sign off at the bottom of the attendance sheet. The center supervisor takes the sign-in sheet for program files. Ahmed then conducts a final check of the bus before the next route, replacing the tokens in the middle and back seats.

At the end of their daily runs, Marguerite and Ahmed park the bus in the yard. They walk through the bus one last time from front to back, checking each seat. They collect and put the tokens away before leaving the yard. The Look Before You Lock symbol posted on the door reminds them to do this, as well.

Marguerite and Ahmed are a team. They work together to actively supervise children on the bus. They also double- and triple-check counts to make sure children are where they should be. They have a plan and follow through with their plan for how to keep children safe. Families, educators, and supervisors help by letting the bus monitor know when children may need extra attention on a bus trip. Families are more at ease because they know that their children are in good hands.

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Self-reflection Tool

Assess Attention Management and Active Supervision Practices

Working as a team, consider the following questions:

How can we use attention management to improve our focus?

How do we set up the bus to easily observe children?

**How do we make sure bus monitors safely position themselves
to see children on the bus at all times?**

**How do we make sure we scan and count continuously during
and at the end of each route?**

How do we listen to determine whether children are safe?

**How do we anticipate child behaviors so we know when to
engage and redirect children**

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To consider how this practice will work for you, use the following tool.

Attention Management and Active Supervision Implementation Plan		
Key Strategy	**Current Practice**	**Action Steps**
Identify and limit distractions.		
Set priorities.		
Stay focused.		
Set up the environment.		
Position staff.		
Scan and count.		
Listen.		
Anticipate children's behavior.		
Engage and redirect.		

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Resources to Learn More

Head Start Program Performance Standards

1310 Head Start Transportation
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1310

Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs, *3rd Edition*

6.5 Transportation
http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/6.5

National Campaigns

- Administration for Children and Families "Look Before You Lock" (July 23, 2012)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBl8EgNxzpI

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: "NHTSA and Safe Kids Worldwide Announce New Partnership to Prevent Child Heatstroke Deaths in Hot Cars" (June 26, 2012)
www.nhtsa.gov/About+NHTSA/Press+Releases/2012/NHTSA+and+Safe+Kids+Worldwide+Announce+New+Partnership+to+Prevent+Child+Heatstroke+Deaths+in+Hot+Cars

- Safe Kids Worldwide: "In and Around Cars"
www.safekids.org/safety-basics/safety-guide/kids-in-and-around-cars/never-leave-your-child-alone.html

- Ray Ray's Pledge
www.rayrayspledge.com

General Transportation Resources

- National Congress on School Transportation
www.ncstonline.org

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: "School Buses"
www.nhtsa.gov/School-Buses

- Healthy Childcare Consultants: "Transportation Safety" (updated September 8, 2012)
www.childhealthonline.org/safety_in_transportation.htm

- Exchange: "Moving Kids Safely in Child Care: A Refresher Course" (January/February 2007)
www.childcareexchange.com/library/5017325.pdf

- Illinois State Board of Education: "Infants, Toddlers and Preschool Transportation"
www.isbe.net/funding/pdf/prek_transport.pdf

- School Transportation News: "School Bus Pre-Trip Inspections" (updated November 18, 2013)
www.stnonline.com/resources/operations/school-bus-pre-trip-inspections

Attention Management Resources

- Life Optimizer: "Attention Management: 7 Tips to Use Your Attention Wisely"
www.lifeoptimizer.org/2007/11/14/attention-management-7-tips-to-use-your-attention-wisely

- Psych Central: "Outsmart Your Stress and Be More Effective at Work" (reviewed March 8, 2012)
http://blogs.psychcentral.com/mindfulness/2009/03/job-its-about-attention-management-not-time-management

- Stagen Leadership Institute: Attention Management: Integral Leadership Program
www.stagen.com/assets/pdf/Attention_web_module.pdf

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Active Supervision Resources

- Head Start National Center on Health. (2012). "Active Supervision: A Referenced Fact Sheet from The National Center on Health."
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/center/safety-injury-prevention/safe-healthy-environments/ActiveSupervisio.htm

- Northern Health: "Supervision of Children" (March 2011)
www.northernhealth.ca/Portals/0/Your_Health/Programs/Community%20Care%20Licensing/Supervision%20of%20Children%2010-410-6024.pdf

- National Childcare Accreditation Council (Australia): "Effective Supervision" (2005)
http://ncac.acecqa.gov.au/educator-resources/factsheets/oshcqa_factsheet2.pdf

- Tanah Merah Child Care Centre (Australia): "Supervision Policy" (created January 10, 2010; reviewed June 2011)
www.tanahmerahchildcare.com.au/uploads/supervision_policy.pdf

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