

Active Supervision on Buses

Head Start transportation teams have an important job. They not only have to make sure buses are safe and routes run on time but also must supervise children on their bus.^[1] Each driver, monitor, and transportation manager has an important role. Together, they make sure that children get to and from programs safely. Children are safer when teams work together and communicate well. This fact sheet explores many of the issues teams are likely to face and active supervision strategies to keep children safe on the bus.

How Can Active Supervision Help You Supervise Children on Buses?

Active supervision is the most effective strategy for creating a safe environment and preventing injuries in young children. It transforms supervision from a passive approach to an active skill. Transportation teams use active supervision when children are boarding, exiting, and riding the bus.^[2]

What Are the Key Strategies for Actively Supervising Children on Buses?

The key strategies for actively supervising children on buses are as follows:

Set Up the Environment

Drivers and monitors set up daily routines that include reminders to help them keep track of who is on the bus. They check and double-check each seat on the bus so they always know which children are on the bus. For example,



- A small object, such as 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.

1 Subpart I—Human Resources Management. 1302.90 Personnel policies. (c)(1)(v) Standards of conduct.

2 Subpart D—Health Program Services. 1302.47 Safety practices. (b)(5) (iii) Safety practices.

Position Staff

If possible, the ratio of bus monitors to children on the bus 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.^[3] Monitors carefully plan where they will sit on the bus during the trip. They choose a seat that allows them to see and hear children and respond when needed. For example,

- Bus monitors sit in the front or the back of the bus.
- If only one bus monitor is on the bus, he or she is seated in the middle.

Scan and Count

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

- Bus monitors record attendance as children board and leave the bus, ideally using name-to-face checks to make sure they release children to the right adult. They may use paper logs or tablets with a photo of each child 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, a teacher, or another 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 frequently spot-check. Other program managers or families sometimes check the bus after the route is finished. This is part of a program's ongoing monitoring system and continuous improvement.



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 and recognize which sounds indicate an immediate need for attention.

Anticipate Children's Behavior

Because children are seated in a Child Safety Restraint System (CSRS) and cannot move around the bus freely, bus monitors must be able to recognize children's needs and respond quickly. They get to know the children on their bus, including their interests and needs, which helps 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 quickly check in with the adult dropping the child off. Understanding each child helps monitors know what to expect when a child is not feeling well or gets upset on the bus.

³ Subpart F—Transportation. 1303.72 Vehicle operation. (a)(3) Safety.

Engage and Redirect

Families and staff let the bus monitor know when children may need extra attention on a bus trip. 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.

In summary, 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.



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 depart, 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 who rides the bus. It is arranged by the scheduled time for each bus stop.

Ahmed sits in a seat in the middle of the bus. He will seat the children from the front to the back so 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 the bus and greets each parent and child. The parent or another authorized adult initials the list next to his or her child's name. Then Ahmed seats the children so he can see and hear them. He fastens their belts and straps them securely in every CSRS to protect them during the trip.

As the bus is moving, Ahmed constantly scans the bus to see and listen to how the children are doing. Some children 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, the children’s teachers come out to greet them. Ahmed and Marguerite conduct a last head count together, and they give the clipboard to a teacher who is waiting outside. As each child exits, a teacher initials next to the child’s name on the clipboard. This provides a written check that each child has been released to an authorized adult. The teachers then walk the children to their classrooms.

When all 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 to make sure they can account for all the children.

When Marguerite and Ahmed 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.



Active Supervision on Buses Self-Reflection Tool

Questions to Help Your Team Assess Your Active Supervision Practices

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 continually 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?

To understand how this approach will work for you, consider using the following tool:

Active Supervision on Buses Implementation Plan

Key Strategy	Current Practice	Action Steps
Set up the environment.		
Position staff.		
Scan and count.		
Listen.		
Anticipate children's behavior.		
Engage and redirect.		

Resources to Learn More

Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. *Caring for Our Children Basics: Health and Safety Foundations for Early Care and Education*. Washington, DC: US Dept of Health and Human Services; 2015. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/caring_for_our_children_basics.pdf. Published June 25, 2015. Accessed May 10, 2017

Standard 2.2.0.1 Methods of Supervision of Children

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs*. 3rd ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2011. <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/>. Accessed May 12, 2017

Standard 1.1.1.4: Ratios and Supervision During Transportation <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/1.1.1.4>

Standard 2.2.0.1: Methods of Supervision of Children <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/2.2.0.1>

National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. Keep children safe using active supervision. Head Start Web site. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices/article/keep-children-safe-using-active-supervision>. Updated December 1, 2016. Accessed May 12, 2017

National Association for the Education of Young Children. Program administrator guide to evaluating child supervision practices. NAEYC Web site. https://www.naeyc.org/academy/files/academy/Supervision%20Resource_0.pdf. Published 2016. Accessed May 12, 2017

Northern Health. Supervision of children. Northern Health Web site. http://www.northernhealth.ca/Portals/0/Your_Health/Programs/Community%20Care%20Licensing/Supervision%20of%20Children%2010-410-6024.pdf. Published 2011. Accessed May 12, 2017

Tanah Merah Child Care Centre (Australia). Supervision policy. Tanah Merah Child Care Centre Web site. http://www.tanahmerahchildcare.com.au/uploads/supervision_policy.pdf. Reviewed May 2011. Accessed May 12, 2017



NATIONAL CENTER ON

Early Childhood Health and Wellness

School readiness begins with health!

1-888-227-5125 • health@ecetta.info • <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/health>