

ACTIVE SUPERVISION TOOLKIT

All staff¹ in an early care and education (ECE) program² have a responsibility to protect the children in their care. Active supervision is the most effective way to prevent injuries and keep children safe. The Administration for Children and Families' Training and Technical Assistance system's National Centers offer many resources to help ECE programs build a comprehensive, agency-wide approach to active supervision. This toolkit will help ECE program leaders, teachers, and family child care providers use these resources to strengthen their active supervision policies and practices.

The toolkit includes three sections. Each section offers ways to improve child supervision.

What is Active Supervision?

Explains the six strategies of active supervision

How Do Early Care and Education Programs Support Active Supervision?

- *Describes how to implement the six strategies in infant/toddler and preschool programs*
- *Describes two-way communication with families to support improved child supervision practices*
- *Includes a section for program leaders in all ECE programs*
- *Includes a section on the role of Head Start program leadership in implementing active supervision in Head Start programs*

Active Supervision Resource Guide

Lists National Center resources that support agency-wide efforts to implement child supervision

What is Active Supervision?

Staff must directly supervise infants, toddlers, and preschoolers at all times during all daily routines, including sleeping, eating, and diapering or bathroom use. Active supervision includes six strategies that are essential for creating safe environments and allowing children to explore their environments safely. Active supervision requires focused attention and intentional observation of children at all times. Programs that use active supervision never leave children unattended.



¹ Staff includes program leaders, teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors—all adults who work in early care and education programs.

² Early care and education programs include center-based early childhood settings and family child care homes as well as home visiting programs. While children's needs do not differ, the way adults meet children's needs in each of these programs may vary.



The six strategies of active supervision are:

- 1. Set up the environment:** Staff set up the environment so they have clear sightlines and access to children. The height and arrangement of furniture and equipment allow effective monitoring and supervision of children at all times.
- 2. Position Staff:** Staff carefully plan where they will position themselves in the environment to prevent harm to children. They place themselves so that they can see and hear all of the children in their care. They make sure there are always clear paths to where children are playing, sleeping, and eating so they can react quickly when necessary. Staff stay close to children who may need additional support.
- 3. Scan and count:** Staff are always able to account for the children in their care. They continuously scan the entire environment so everyone knows where each child is and what they are doing. They count the children frequently and use name-to-face recognition by visually identifying each child. This is especially important during transitions when children are moving from one location to another.
- 4. Listen:** Staff listen closely to children to identify signs of potential danger. Specific sounds or the absence of them may signify reason for concern. They may employ additional strategies to safeguard children. For example, bells added to doors may alert staff when a child leaves or enters the room.
- 5. Anticipate children's behavior:** Staff use their knowledge of each child's development and abilities to anticipate what they will do. Staff who know what to expect are better able to protect children from harm.
- 6. Engage and redirect:** Staff provide individualized, responsive caregiving and intervene when children are unable to problem-solve on their own. They may offer different levels of assistance or redirection depending on each individual child's needs.

How Do Early Care and Education Programs Support Active Supervision?

Keeping children safe is a top priority for all ECE programs. Implementing the active supervision strategies requires leadership, planning, tracking and ongoing monitoring, and professional development. The strategies are useful in all environments. This includes classrooms, family child care homes, playgrounds, and on [vehicles](#) when programs are transporting children. Home visitors can modify the strategies to share with families during home visits. The strategies are particularly important to use when children arrive, leave, and transition between activities and when there are changes in staffing patterns or children's routines. In addition, staff recognize when children need additional support and help them solve problems as they arise.

Using active supervision and paying close attention to children's activities and exploration keeps children safe and supports school readiness. Many resources are available to help staff [keep children safe using active supervision](#). [Tips for Keeping Children Safe: A Developmental Guide](#) describes the safety needs of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who attend center-based programs. [Tips for Keeping Infants and Toddlers Safe: A Developmental Guide for Home Visitors](#) offers safety tips to share with families in home-based (home visiting) programs. Programs can use the information in these developmental guides to train new staff or refresh staff understanding of active supervision strategies. Additional guidelines for supervising infants and young children are included in *Caring for Our Children (CFOC)* [Standard 2.2.0.1: Methods of Supervision of Children](#). These resources can also help orient parents who volunteer in the classroom.



Infant and Toddler Settings

Children in ECE programs may receive care in center-based programs or family child care homes or through home-based services. Staff may supervise children of similar ages or mixed-age groupings. It is important that staff use active supervision strategies in the context of their individual program design.

All programs serving infants and toddlers care for children in small groups. Low adult/child ratios and primary caregiving practices encourage responsive interactions between children and their caregivers. In family child care homes where there are one or two caregivers, [primary caregiving](#) occurs naturally. Primary caregiving is a relationship-based practice and is the process of assigning each child (and family) to a teacher who will serve as the primary source of information and care for the child. In center-based programs, a primary caregiving approach can ensure responsive care that fosters strong connections between teachers and children. Primary caregiving also helps adults build awareness of each child's development. [Individualizing Care for Infants and Toddlers](#) offers resources about program structures and staff practices that support responsive caregiving.



Nurturing, safe, engaging environments are central to the quality care that supports active supervision. [News You Can Use: Environment as Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers](#) and “[Creating a Responsive Environment for Infants and Toddlers](#)” in the [Infant/Toddler Curriculum Series](#) are two resources that describe how to create and maintain safe, interesting, and welcoming learning environments for infants and toddlers. [Supporting Outdoor Play and Exploration for Infants and Toddlers](#) outlines issues to consider when taking infants and toddlers outdoors. It focuses on planning and creating outdoor play spaces and learning opportunities as well as program policies and procedures. Planned transitions are another important part of effective child supervision. The resource [News You Can Use: Transitions](#) offers ways to support children through the many transitions in Early Head Start and is applicable to all ECE programs.

Ultimately, carefully planned environments, adults who support nurturing and engaged caregiving, and well-planned, responsive care routines support active supervision in infant and toddler environments.

Preschool Settings

Staff create safe environments by arranging the classroom or family child care area so that they can see, hear, and quickly reach children at all times. A brief video and related resources on [Designing Environments](#) offer tips for setting up a preschool classroom to support children's learning and staff supervision.

Staff can best supervise children by positioning themselves strategically so they can easily see, hear, and quickly reach children at all times. Three planning tools help staff think intentionally about positioning. A [staff zoning chart](#) and [classroom zoning map](#) from the in-service suite on zoning show how zoning encourages children's learning and keeps children safe. Posting [Tips for Teachers: Zoning to Maximize Learning](#) in a visible spot can remind staff to use effective zoning practices. A [transition planning chart](#) from the [in-service suite](#) on classroom transitions supports safe transitions in center-based programs.

Anticipating children's behaviors and knowing when to engage and redirect children are two critical active supervision skills. The [Being Aware of Children's Needs](#) in-service suite offers techniques for focusing on children's needs. The [Anticipating Problem Situations](#) tool in the [Behavior Guidance: Problem Solving in the Moment](#) in-service suite offers scenarios to help adults anticipate problems. Supervisors can use this [Observation Form](#) to help teaching staff think about ways to anticipate children's behavior. The presentation from the



Behavior Guidance: Redirecting Behavior in-service suite includes strategies to address problems before they occur.

Communicating about children’s needs and schedule changes helps staff work together to keep children safe and the classroom running smoothly. The *Teacher-to-Teacher Talk Tips for Teachers* reminds teachers of the importance of communicating well for effective teamwork.

The Role of Program Leaders

In all ECE programs, program leaders ensure that staff meet child safety and supervision regulations and best practices. When everyone understands their role in and responsibility for implementing safety practices and has the knowledge and skills to keep children safe at all times, the result is more effective child supervision and lower rates of injury. Programs that think systemically about child supervision use active supervision strategies to create safe learning environments for infants, toddlers, and preschool children in all ECE settings.

Each program should develop policies and procedures for how staff will actively supervise children at all times, including during transitions. Programs should develop these policies and procedures with input from staff and families. They should also consider how to communicate these policies and procedures to all adults in the program, including substitute staff, contractors, and volunteers. *Model Child Care Health Policies* has a sample supervision policy that programs can adapt to fit site-specific requirements.

Using an active supervision checklist, such as the *Supervision and Ratio Best Practices Checklist* from the *Virtual Lab School* or the *Tool for Supervisors* from the Zoning to Maximize Learning *in-service suite* can help adults observe active supervision strategies and identify strengths and areas for improvement. The Virtual Lab School’s lesson on *Ensuring Staff-to-Child Ratios and Appropriate Supervision Practices Are Followed at All Times* describes best practices to ensure that staff provide appropriate supervision indoors and outdoors. In home-based settings, home visitors support parents or other caregivers to incorporate safety and supervision practices into their daily routines.

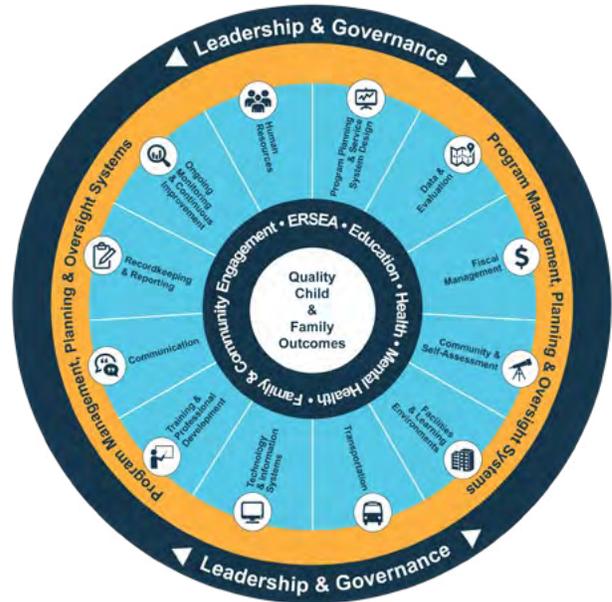


Figure 1. Head Start Management Systems Wheel

The Role of Head Start Program Leadership

Head Start program leadership (governing body/tribal council, Policy Council, and key management staff) set the stage for developing a culture of safety. Policy Council parents, in their role as leaders and advocates, play a critical role in informing supervision strategies.

Head Start leadership use the Head Start management systems to implement consistent and effective safety practices throughout the program. The *Head Start Management Systems Wheel* is a visual representation of the 12 program management, planning, and oversight systems that



are critical to sound program infrastructure and high-quality service delivery. [*Head Start Management Systems: Guiding Questions for Active Supervision and Child Safety*](#) is a resource to help management staff evaluate each of the management systems that support the implementation of active supervision.

In Head Start programs, an effective governing body/tribal council and Policy Council work with management staff to ensure the safety of all children. They exercise their oversight responsibility by asking programs to share information about their safety practices, including active supervision. Policy Council parents share this information with other families so that everyone can work together to keep children safe. Management staff and governing bodies work together to promptly address safety concerns and correct quality and compliance issues.

Head Start programs can use [*Foundation II: Leadership, Systems, and Service*](#) to build and sustain a culture of safety that includes active supervision. The [*Learning for New Leaders: Head Start A to Z*](#) series helps directors and other key management staff examine their leadership style, reflect on organizational change, and link systems and services to improve programming for children and families.

Planning is critical in creating a culture of safety in programs. Head Start programs can use [*Foundations for Excellence: A Guide for Five-Year Planning and Continuous Improvement, 2nd Edition*](#) to set goals, objectives, and expected outcomes and use data to measure their progress.

Two-Way Communication with Families

Communicating regularly with families is key to developing nurturing relationships with children. All programs should have a comprehensive plan for communicating their policies and procedures related to child supervision. This includes:

- Supervision plans and procedures that support pick-up and drop-off conversations with families, since children require close supervision during transitions



- The program's expectations about
 - Who is responsible for supervising children in a home-based socialization or on a field trip when the parent/guardian is present
 - Who is responsible for supervising a child at pick-up and drop-off times and after the parent/guardian has signed their child out but is still on Head Start property

Ongoing communication with families, including checking in daily with each family, can help staff plan for supervision. Families can help staff learn about their child's interests, abilities, and needs, which helps staff anticipate when to engage and redirect the children in their care. Supervision strategies should be informed by parents' knowledge and reports—for example, about a child who is very tired, recovering from an illness, has had an emotionally challenging experience, or is working on a new skill. Strong relationships with families help programs tailor their approaches and create partnerships that ensure children are safe at home and in their ECE program.



Active Supervision Resource Guide

General Active Supervision Resources

Active Supervision

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices/article/active-supervision>

Active Supervision on Buses

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/active-supervision-on-buses.pdf>

Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards, Guidelines for Early Care and Education, Standard 2.2.0.1: Methods of Supervision of Children

<http://nrckids.org/CFOC/Database/2.2.0.1>

Keep Children Safe Using Active Supervision

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices/article/keep-children-safe-using-active-supervision>

Tips for Keeping Children Safe: A Developmental Guide

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices/article/tips-keeping-children-safe-developmental-guide>

Infant and Toddler Active Supervision Resources

EHS TA Paper No. 14: Supporting Outdoor Play and Exploration for Infants and Toddlers

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/learning-environments/article/supporting-outdoor-play-exploration-infants-toddlers>

Individualizing Care for Infants and Toddlers

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/teaching-practices/article/individualizing-care-infants-toddlers>

Infant/Toddler Teacher Time Episode 2

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/infanttoddler-teacher-time-episode-2>

News You Can Use: Environment as Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/learning-environments/article/news-you-can-use-environment-curriculum-infants-toddlers>

News You Can Use: Transitions

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/transitions/article/news-you-can-use-transitions>

Tips for Keeping Infants and Toddlers Safe:

A Developmental Guide for Home Visitors

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/safety-practices/article/tips-keeping-infants-toddlers-safe-developmental-guide-home-visitors>

Professional Development In-Service Suites and Tools and Worksheets to Support Active Supervision

Behavior Guidance:

Problem Solving in the Moment

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/problem-solving-moment>

- **Anticipating Problem Situations: Problem Solving in the Moment**
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/behavior-guidance/problemsolving-la-anticipate.pdf>
- **Observation Form, Tools for Supervisors: Problem Solving in the Moment**
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/behavior-guidance/problemsolving-supervisortools.pdf>

Behavior Guidance: Redirecting Behavior

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/redirecting-behavior>

Building Relationships:

Being Aware of Children's Needs

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/being-aware-childrens-needs>

Managing the Classroom: Classroom Transitions

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/classroom-transitions>

- **Planning for Transitions: Classroom Transitions (Transition Planning Chart)**
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/managing-the-classroom/classroom-transitions-planning.pdf>
- **Tips for Teachers: Classroom Transitions**
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/managing-the-classroom/classroom-transitions-teacher-tips.pdf>



- **Tools for Supervisors: Classroom Transitions, Supporting Positive Behaviors During Classroom Transitions: Observation Form**
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/managing-the-classroom/classroom-transitions-supervisor-tools.pdf>

Managing the Classroom: Designing Environments
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/designing-environments>

Staffing: Zoning to Maximize Learning
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/zoning-maximize-learning>

- **Classroom Map with Zoning Areas: Zoning to Maximize Learning**
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/staffing/zoning-areas.pdf>
- **Staff Zoning Chart: Zoning to Maximize Learning**
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/staffing/zoning-staff-chart.pdf>
- **Tips for Teachers: Zoning to Maximize Learning**
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/staffing/zoning-teacher-tips-rev.pdf>
- **Tools for Supervisors: Zoning to Maximize Learning (Observation Checklist)**
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/iss/staffing/zoning-supervisor-tools-rev.pdf>

Teacher-to-Teacher Talk
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/teacher-teacher-talk>

Head Start Leadership Resources

Foundations for Excellence: A Guide for Five-Year Planning and Continuous Improvement, 2nd Edition
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/foundations-excellence-guide-five-year-planning-continuous-improvement-2nd-edition>

Guiding Questions for Active Supervision and Safety: Using the Head Start Management Systems Wheel
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/guiding-questions-active-supervision-safety>

Program Governance
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/organizational-leadership/article/program-governance>

Family Engagement Resources

Building Partnerships: Guide to Developing Relationships with Families
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/developing-relationships-families/building-partnerships-guide-developing>

Families as Advocates & Leaders
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/article/understanding-family-engagement-outcomes-research-practice-series>

