

Active Supervision Week: Ann Linehan

Ann Linehan: Hello and welcome to the week on active supervision: "Keeping Our Children Safe." Every day, our Head Start and Early Head Start families entrust their children to our care. Parents, grandparents, and guardians drop off their children believing that their children will be safe, well cared for and learn what they need to be school ready. An important aspect of keeping children safe is ensuring that no child is ever left unsupervised.

Last August, we, at the Office of Head Start, held a webinar discuss the importance of not leaving children unattended on school buses. In that webinar Amanda Bryans, Division Director of Education and Comprehensive Services and I talked about active supervision and the need for programs to develop and implement redundant systems. A series of checks and balances so that no one person is responsible for ensuring a child's safety.

These systems include attendance sheets with children's photos that are triple checked -- first once the child gets on the bus in the morning, secondly when each child gets off at the program site and third and a final check when each child enters the classroom.

However, active supervision goes beyond school buses. Active supervision includes the classroom, hallways, bathrooms, playgrounds and field trips. Active supervision is in the infant and toddler rooms, where we sit and interact with mobile and non-mobile infants, even when they are sleeping.

It's in the preschool classrooms, where the furniture is low enough for children to reach and touch the items on the shelves, but also low enough so that we can scan, count and observe each child as he or she is playing and learning.

Active supervision is also the responsibility of program leaders, who must ensure child:staff ratios and train staff and volunteers on child safety and supervision.

This week on active supervision, our national centers have scheduled a series of interactive webinars to showcase resources and engage programs in discussion on what active supervision looks like in the program setting. One of the resources that will be highlighted is the new ECLKC page "Keeping Children Safe Using Active Supervision." This website centralizes our resources on active supervision, including zoning, infant and toddlers settings and program governance.

As you participate this week, I encourage you to consider the following questions: What in my program could be improved? How could I incorporate what was learned into my daily practice? What strategies are working in my program and should be shared? How are staff and volunteers trained on supervision strategies, attendance procedures? Are my classrooms and playgrounds adequately staffed to ensure proper child:staff ratios? What procedures are in place when a child is unaccounted for so that the child is found immediately?

There has been some concern regarding staff terminations related to unsupervised children. OHS cannot determine your hiring and firing policies. However, as you engage in discussions this week, I encourage you to consider whether the underlying causes for a child being left unattended are being addressed. Too many times, a staff person is terminated only to have a similar incident occur within the same grantee.

We believe that no one intentionally leaves a child unattended, yet it happens far too frequently. We hope this week will help reinforce the importance of this issue among programs and the responsibility we have to the children and families we serve to keep them safe. Please let us know how we at the federal office can better assist you. As you participate on the webinar, Twitter and Facebook, tell us what's working well and how we can provide you the tools you need.