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Active Supervision on Buses

Head Start transportation teams — including drivers, monitors, and transportation managers — share the important tasks of supervising the children on their buses and making sure they get to and from programs safely ([45 CFR §1302.90](#)). Working together using [active supervision](#), transportation teams create a safe environment and prevent injuries in young children on buses and other vehicles.

Transportation teams use active supervision strategies when children are boarding, exiting, and riding the bus ([45 CFR §1302.47](#)). They also use active supervision strategies to help make sure children exit at the right destination. Review Caring for Our Children standards [2.2.0.1: Methods of Supervision of Children](#) and [1.1.1.4: Ratios and Supervision During Transportation](#) and follow these steps for actively supervising children on buses.



Set Up the Environment

Create daily routines that include reminders to help drivers and monitors keep track of who is on the bus. Consider these strategies:

- Place a small object, such as a token, underneath the last seat for the monitor or driver to collect after finishing each route.
- Use a bus alarm system that activates when the bus is turned off so the driver has to walk to the back of the bus to deactivate it.
- Double-check each seat before leaving a parked bus to make sure there are no children left on the bus.



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Position Staff

Monitors should carefully plan where they will sit during the trip, choosing a seat that allows them to see and hear all children and respond when needed. If possible, follow the same ratio for monitors as for teachers to children in the early childhood setting.

- When there are two monitors, one can sit in the front and one in the back of the bus.
- If only one monitor is on the bus, they can sit in the middle.

Monitors should stay with the bus until all children have been picked up by an authorized adult ([45 CFR §1303.72](#)).



Scan and Count

Bus monitors should scan and count frequently to know which children are on the bus, where they are, and what they are doing. This can be done in multiple ways; for example:

- Bus monitors should use a [sign-in sheet](#) to record attendance as children board and leave the bus. Ideally, monitors also use name-to-face checks to make sure they release children to the right adult. They may use paper logs or electronic devices for this purpose.
- An authorized staff member (e.g., center director, teacher) should sign off on the bus sign-in sheet once all children are in their care at the program. Family members or other authorized adults should sign the bus sign-in sheet when their child is dropped off at the end of the program day.
- The bus monitor and driver should scan the bus and check each seat at the end of every trip to make sure no children are still on.
- Whenever possible, someone other than the driver or monitor (e.g., transportation supervisor, program manager, designated family member) should also check the bus at the end of each shift. Spot checks are part of a program's ongoing monitoring system and continuous improvement.



Listen

Bus monitors should always be listening to children and alert to sounds that signal danger. They should identify the causes of these sounds right away to determine whether immediate attention is needed.



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 and respond quickly to children's needs. By getting to know the children on their bus, including their interests and needs, monitors can predict how they will behave in various circumstances and can better gauge when a child is upset or unwell. For example:

- As much as possible, bus drivers and monitors should work the same routes every day so they can build relationships with the children and their families.
- As part of this relationship building, bus monitors should routinely do a quick check-in with the adult whenever dropping off or picking up a child.



Engage and Redirect

Families and staff should be encouraged to let the bus monitor know when children may need extra attention on a bus trip. They should strategize together on ways to help the child manage their feelings. The monitor should also be ready to closely observe and react quickly if the child does need extra support on the bus, such as by soothing, distracting, or refocusing a child who becomes upset and needs help calming down. The monitor may choose to sit close to a child who needs extra attention.



Supervision in Action

The following story shows how one transportation team uses active supervision strategies to ensure the safety of all children traveling by bus.

Driver Marguerite and bus monitor Ahmed begin their day by boarding bus 31 in the lot behind the Happy Days Head Start program. Before they depart, Ahmed goes to the back of the bus and places white tokens on Velcro spots underneath the last two seats. Then, he moves to the middle rows and places tokens underneath those seats as well. At the end of the day, he and Marguerite will retrieve the tokens as a way of making sure they have checked every seat to confirm it is empty.

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

At every stop, Ahmed gets off the bus and greets each parent and child. The parent or another authorized adult initials the list next to their child's name. Then, Ahmed seats the children so he can see and hear them. He fastens their belts and straps them securely in their 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 their buckles fastened.



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