



Set Up the Environment   Position Staff   Scan and Count   Listen   Anticipate Children's Behavior   Engage and Redirect

# Active Supervision

Active supervision promotes a safe environment and prevents injuries in young children. It requires focused attention and intentional observation at all times. Staff use active supervision strategies to make sure children of all ages explore their environments safely. Each program can keep children safe by teaching all staff how to look, listen, and engage.

Keeping children safe is a top priority for all Head Start and Early Head Start programs ([45 CFR §1302.102](#)). The Head Start Program Performance Standards require that programs “ensure no child is left alone or unsupervised by staff, consultants, contractors, or volunteers while under their care” ([45 CFR §1302.90](#)).

Using active supervision, staff position themselves so that they can always observe all children — watching, counting, and listening. During transitions, they account for all children with name-to-face recognition by visually identifying each child. Staff also use their knowledge of each child’s development and abilities to anticipate what they will do, then get involved and redirect them when necessary. This constant vigilance helps children learn safely. Review Caring for Our Children standard [2.2.0.1: Methods of Supervision of Children](#) to learn more.

All Head Start staff and volunteers are responsible for making sure no child is left unsupervised. Active supervision is a strategy that works. It can be used in classrooms and family child care and on playgrounds and buses. It can also be shared with families as a tool to use at home. This fact sheet explains what active supervision is and how to use it in your program. Print and display the [at-a-glance handout](#) and [poster](#) to remind everyone of active supervision strategies.



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# Strategies to Put Active Supervision in Place

The following strategies allow children to explore their environments safely. Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers must be directly supervised at all times ([45 CFR §1302.47](#)). This includes daily routines such as sleeping, eating, and diapering or bathroom use. Programs that use active supervision never leave children unattended.



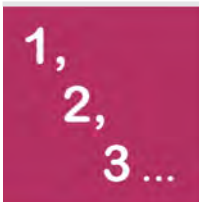
## Set Up the Environment

Staff should set up the environment so they can supervise children and always have access to them. Grouping activities together and making sure furniture is at waist height or shorter allows adults to see and hear children. Small spaces should be free of clutter, and big spaces should have clear play spaces for children that staff can observe.



## Position Staff

Staff should carefully plan where they will position themselves to protect children from harm. This includes positioning themselves to see and hear all children in their care. Staff should make sure there are clear paths to where children are playing, sleeping, and eating. This allows staff to react quickly when necessary and stay close to children who may need additional support.



## Scan and Count

Staff should always be able to account for the children in their care. They continuously scan the entire environment to know where everyone is and what they are doing. They also count the children frequently. This is especially important during transitions when children are moving from one location to another.



## Listen

Specific sounds or the absence of them may be cause for concern. Staff who listen closely to children can quickly identify signs of potential danger. Programs that plan systemically are better able to implement additional strategies to safeguard children. For example, adding bells to doors help alert staff when a child leaves or enters the room.



## Anticipate Children's Behavior

Staff should use what they know about each child's interests and skills to predict what the child will do next. They can create challenges that children are ready for and support them in succeeding. Staff should also be aware of changes in a child's mood and anticipate when a child may wander off, get upset, or take a dangerous risk. Information from the daily health check (e.g., illness, allergies, lack of sleep or food) informs staff observations and helps predict children's behavior. Staff who know what to expect are better able to protect such children from harm.



## Engage and Redirect

Staff should offer support by using what they know about each child's individual needs and development. Staff can encourage children to solve problems on their own and help them develop solutions if needed. They can also offer different levels of assistance or redirection depending on each child's needs.

# What Does Active Supervision Look Like?

To think about what active supervision would look like in your program, consider the following examples of observed actions and specific strategies.

Observed Action	Strategy
<p>Maria and Yasmin have taken their classroom of 3-year-old children to the playground for outdoor playtime. The 15-foot square playground has a plastic climber, a water/sand table, and a swing set. Maria and Yasmin stand at opposite corners of the playground so they can move quickly when a child needs assistance.</p>	<p><b>Position Staff</b></p>
<p>The children scatter throughout the playground to various areas. Some prefer the climber, while others like the swings. Many of the children play with the sand table because it is new. Maria and Yasmin agree on a supervision plan that includes which children Maria and Yasmin will each observe.</p>	<p><b>Position Staff</b></p>
<p>Maria and Yasmin always count the children assigned to them, occasionally raising their fingers to show each other how many children they have. They keep track of where the children are and make sure no one is missing. If one child moves to a different area of the playground, they signal to each other so they are both aware.</p>	<p><b>Scan and Count</b></p>
<p>Maria notices that Felicity loves to play in the sand table. She hears children scolding each other.</p>	<p><b>Listen</b></p>
<p>Maria knows that Felicity throws toys without looking. As she sees Felicity and Ahmed playing at the sand table, Maria stands behind Felicity and suggests she put the toy back in the basket when she is done.</p>	<p><b>Anticipate Children's Behavior</b></p>
<p>By remaining close, Maria is also able to redirect Ahmed, who has never seen a sand table before and is throwing sand at his classmates.</p>	<p><b>Engage and Redirect</b></p>
<p>Kellan has been experimenting with some of the climbing equipment and jumps from the third step onto the ground. The motor skills of some of the other children are not as advanced, but they also try to do it. To help build these skills, Yasmin stands close to the steps on the climbing structure.</p>	<p><b>Anticipate Children's Behavior</b></p>
<p>Yasmin offers a hand or suggests a lower step to those who are not developmentally ready.</p>	<p><b>Engage and Redirect</b></p>
<p>Maria and Yasmin signal to each other five minutes before playtime is over, then tell the children they have five minutes left to play. When the children have one minute left, Maria hands out color circles that match colored squares painted on the ground.</p>	<p><b>Set Up the Environment</b></p>
<p>Maria asks Beto, a child who has trouble coming inside from play time, to help her.</p>	<p><b>Engage and Redirect</b></p>
<p>When Maria and Yasmin hand the children colored circles, the children move to stand on the colored squares on the playground. As the children move to the line, Maria guides them to the right square.</p>	<p><b>Engage and Redirect</b></p>
<p>When all children are in line, both Maria and Yasmin count the children again. They scan the playground to make sure everyone is in place, then move the children back into the classroom.</p>	<p><b>Scan and Count</b></p>
<p>Maria and Yasmin also listen to be sure that they do not hear any of the children still on the playground.</p>	<p><b>Listen</b></p>
<p>Yasmin heads the line and Maria takes the back end, holding Beto's hand.</p>	<p><b>Position Staff</b></p>
<p>When they return to the classroom, there are spots on the floor with the same colors that were on the playground. The children move to stand on their matching color in the classroom.</p>	<p><b>Set Up the Environment</b></p>
<p>Maria and Yasmin take a final count, collect the circles, and begin the next activity.</p>	<p><b>Scan and Count</b></p>

Both Yasmin and Maria are actively engaged with the children and each other. They use systems and strategies to observe children at all times while supporting developmentally appropriate learning, teaching children how to assess risk, and keeping them safe.

# Self-reflection Tool

To understand how this approach will work for you, consider the following questions and implementation plan.

## Assess Active Supervision Practices

How do we teach active supervision strategies and support staff when they apply these skills in everyday practice?

How do we arrange the space to create a safe environment in classrooms, playgrounds, and family child care homes so it is easy for staff to observe children?

How can staff position themselves to see and hear children at all times and move quickly to children who need assistance?

How do we make sure staff continuously scan and count children during both indoor and outdoor play?

How do staff assess individual children's skills and abilities, adapt activities to avoid potential injuries, and use their observational skills to anticipate times when a child may need closer supervision?

How do staff engage and redirect children who need additional support?

# Active Supervision 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		



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