



Using Active Supervision at Home: A Step-by-Step Guide for Families

What is active supervision?

Active supervision is an effective strategy to support children in engaging in expected or desired behavior. To use active supervision, the adult or caregiver frequently monitors children in specific settings or during activities before problems occur. Active supervision keeps children safe, minimizes behavior problems, and promotes the learning and use of desired behaviors. Active supervision involves a few key steps: set expectations, frequently looking around (scanning), positive interactions (verbal and nonverbal precorrections and reminders), reinforcement of desired behavior, and, when necessary, correction to help children learn the expected behavior.

How do I use this strategy at home?

In the table below, we provide the steps for how to get started with active supervision at home. Following the steps are two examples, one for younger children and one for older youth.

Step	Description
Step 1	Identify the setting or activity that would benefit most from active supervision.
Step 2	Ensure that your child understands the routines and expectations for the setting or activity. If not, routines and expectations must be established.
Step 3	Remind your child to get started with the next part of their day (e.g., transition) or to begin an activity.
Step 4	As the activity unfolds, look around and monitor you child’s behavior.
Step 5	Use proximity (physical closeness), verbal cues, and other non-verbal communication (e.g., smile, wink) to let your child know you are paying attention to what they are doing.
Step 6	If a problem comes up, talk with your child privately, in a non-emotional way, and give opportunities for positive interactions between you and your child.
Step 7	At different times throughout the activity, and at the end of the activity, praise your child’s desirable behavior with positive comments and gestures.
Step 8	Provide your child with an opportunity to give feedback.

This resource was supported in part by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R324N0002 to University of Kansas. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

For additional information see:

Lane, K. L., Menzies, H. M., Ennis, R. P., & Oakes, W. P. (2015). *Supporting behavior for school success: A step-by-step guide to key strategies*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.



Using Active Supervision at Home: A Step-by-Step Guide for Families

Example. With my elementary-age child

Step 1. Caleb’s new chore was being responsible for cleaning the doorknobs for all the inside doors each evening after dinner. His dad was confident in his ability to clean the doorknobs thoroughly but thought active supervision might be useful during this important chore.

Step 2. Caleb and his dad sat down after dinner on the first night of the new chore and talked about the importance of keeping their home germ-free especially with COVID-19 being a risk. He showed Caleb where the disinfecting cleaner and paper towels were stored and practiced the handwashing recommendations by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](https://www.cdc.gov)). They also added this chore to the family schedule in the block for after dinner chores. On the first night, Caleb and his dad cleaned the doorknobs together.

Step 3. The next night, Caleb’s dad asked him to check the after dinner chores on the family schedule. Caleb remembered his job and got started.

Step 4. As Caleb cleaned the first few doorknobs, his dad watched as he finished the dinner dishes.

Step 5. As Caleb moved to other areas of the house, his dad stayed in close proximity to him. His dad decided he would clean the light switches so that he could be in close proximity to Caleb in case Caleb had questions or needed help.

Step 6. A few times, Caleb seemed to hurry through the task. His dad calmly talked with him to remind him of the importance of his chore.

Step 7. When Caleb’s dad saw him taking his time and doing a thorough job, he offered behavior specific praise and encouragement. For example, “Caleb I see you taking your time to clean the doorknobs well. That will get rid of all the germs.” or “Caleb, thank you for remembering not to touch the doorknob after you clean it, until you wash your hands.”

Step 8. After the first few days, Caleb’s dad asked him if it was helpful to have him near when he was doing his chores. Caleb said, “Yes! Thank you, dad. I know this is an important job.”



Using Active Supervision at Home: A Step-by-Step Guide for Families

Example. With my middle or high school child ...

Step 1. Peyton was a senior in high school and needless to say, missing his friends and all the end of the year senior activities. Peyton and his family set up time each day for everyone to get some exercise. They had been going to a local outdoor track during good weather a couple days a week. His parents thought this might be a good place to use active supervision as other kids might be there as well.

Step 2. Before heading out to the track, his dad talked through what was expected at the track. Using the expectation matrix they had made together, his dad reminded him that if he ran into his friends he could definitely talk and hang out; however, they would need to keep him safe by practicing social distancing (e.g., staying 6 feet away and not touching). Peyton asked if it was still okay to “elbow bump” instead of high five. His dad reminded him that the guidelines from the CDC had changed and that now, no contact was recommended (e.g., no high fives, elbow bumps, handshakes, or hugs).

Step 3. When Peyton, his brother Christian, and his mom and dad got to the track, his mom and dad said to have fun and be safe. Both parents planned to jog three miles (hopefully!).

Step 4. While the parents were jogging around the track, they watched their sons work out with the dumbbells they brought to the track. They each had a set of 35lb weights and were doing a CrossFit™ workout: five rounds for time of 400 meter run, 20 shoulders to overhead, and 15 sit ups.

Step 5. When Peyton or Christian jogged by them around the track, they gave their children a nod or smile.

Step 6. At one point, Peyton’s girlfriend showed up at the track and she went over to talk with him after his WOD (workout of the day). It looked like he was a little too close – definitely not touching, but definitely not 6 feet apart. When the dad got close to Peyton on the track, he smiled at his son and said, “Hey bud, please run this last lap with me.” Peyton told his girlfriend he would be right back and joined his dad. His dad reminded him that it was too close and he really wanted to keep both Peyton and his girlfriend safe. Peyton said he understood, finished the lap, and went back to talk with his girlfriend – 6 feet apart.

Step 7. His dad thanked Peyton for understanding and smiled. “Thanks for understanding, son. I really want you guys both to be safe.”

Step 8. Later that night, Peyton’s parents asked him if he felt comfortable with the way they handled things at the track and he say “Yeah, I get it. It is hard not to be close, but I get it. And, thanks for not embarrassing me in front of her.”