



PARENT HANDBOOK

for Community-Based Programs

2022-2023

Easterseals of Southeastern PA

Connect with us



August, 2022

Dear Easterseals Parent,

We welcome you to the Easterseals programs. Whether your child is enrolled in our Approved Private School, Preschool program, or is to receive home or community-based intervention, all of us - administration, staff and volunteers – strive to be of help to your child and your family.

Your child's development in our program is our primary concern. As you know from meeting with some of our teachers and therapists, our academic curriculum is individualized for each child. And, as a parent, you are an important member of the team as we work together to set goals and work with your child to achieve them.

Good communication will enable us to work closely to maximize your child's progress. We hope you will take advantage of the many communication and information vehicles available to you in order to maintain the relationship between home and the Easterseals program. We encourage you to call or send notes whenever you have a question. All of us – teachers, therapists, social workers, and administrative staff – welcome your inquiries. We also encourage you to participate in Back-to-School events, training opportunities, and parent support meetings, as well as Easterseals fund raising events.

There may be times when you do not understand the reason for a policy or procedure or perhaps you would like to see a change in your child's program. You should not hesitate to discuss your concerns with any member of your child's team. Please also remember that our door is open and we hope that you feel free to discuss any issues or concerns with us.

We look forward to an interesting and fulfilling year of working with you and your child. Watching your child grow and acquire physical, social, cognitive, communication and social-emotional skills will be exciting for all of us.

Welcome!

Carl G Webster

Carl G. Webster
Executive Director/CEO

AGENCY MISSION

The mission of Easterseals of Southeastern Pennsylvania is *“to provide exceptional services to ensure that all people with disabilities or special needs and their families have equal opportunities to live, learn, work and play in their communities.”*

Easterseals staff fulfills this mission by incorporating these values into their work as the foundation of Easterseals and a guide to our actions:

Integrity

We conduct business ethically, and with a commitment to moral integrity. We expect people to hold a high moral standard. When faced with an ethical dilemma, we do what is right, regardless of the consequences.

Respect

We respect each other. We value the uniqueness and dignity of each individual, and appreciate the strength of diversity and inclusion.

Shared Purpose

We share a sense of purpose. We have an enthusiastic sense of mission. We believe that to better meet our mission, we must work as a unified organization.

Excellence

We value excellence. We value people who get involved and show a sense of urgency. We believe it takes excellent, confident and accountable people to create innovative solutions that are valued by the people we serve.

Responsiveness

We strive to continually understand and proactively respond to the increasing and changing needs of the people we serve as well as those who pay for the services.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE SCHOOL

The intent of our school program is to maximize each child's ability to benefit from an educational experience that addresses the "whole child" - their cognitive development, socialization opportunities, ability to communicate effectively with others, and physical needs.

Our school program strives for programming which integrates therapeutic intervention with the acquisition of educational goals through a model of integrative programming. Integrative programming is a process which occurs when parents, teachers, and therapists have a coordinated approach to the use of therapeutic techniques and the implementation of goals throughout the naturally occurring routines in a child's day.

The expectation is that staff is accepting of family values, concerns, and priorities, and that these needs are taken into consideration in the development of individualized education plans.

It is important for all children to be accepted by their peers and to feel a part of the larger community outside of their school environment. To give our children the opportunity to interact and develop relationships with their typical peers, we continue to seek out inclusive opportunities within our own classrooms, or with other community preschool and school age programs. Our goal is to develop activities that allow the children enrolled in Easterseals to learn and play together with their peers.

NATIONAL ACCREDITATION AND STATE REGULATION

Easterseals values the validation of quality provided by national and regional accrediting or regulatory bodies. As such, all of our center-based educational programs located in Easterseals facilities hold accreditation from the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs. This is a division of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) that administers the accreditation system. The aspects of our programs that are evaluated include: children (relationships, curriculum, teaching, assessment of child progress, and health); teachers; family and community partners; and program administration (physical environment and leadership and management).

Easterseals programs are also regulated by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning. As such we participate in periodic compliance monitoring activities and also follow the State's Early Learning Standards for Infant, Toddler, and Pre-Kindergarten programs.

All Easterseals programs either have been designated as Keystone STARS programs or are in the process of obtaining Keystone STARS designation. This is a state-wide system which assigns programs to a STARS level which is indicative of their demonstration of quality indicators.

Programs which operate Early Head Start or child care programs also maintain licensure with the Department of Human Services as Child Care centers.

GOALS FOR YOUR CHILD

The goal of Easterseals school programs is to provide your child with an appropriate educational program with state-of-the-art techniques, and to assure a successful transition to the next step in his/her education.

To accomplish this goal, the following strategies are used:

- Educational and therapeutic goals are integrated in the school and home program to enable the child to become as independent as possible.
- Activities that stimulate cognitive, physical, sensory, communication, social and emotional development are the focus of our planned learning program.
- A coordinated team works with each child.
-

GOALS FOR THE FAMILY

Our goal is to involve parents fully as team members in planning, implementing, and adding to your child's individualized program.

To accomplish this goal, the following strategies are used:

- Parents are encouraged to communicate freely by telephone, by notes sent with their child.
- Parents actively participate in developing their child's individualized program.
- The staff welcomes collaboration and consultation with parents to ensure the best possible program for each child.

THE EASTERSEALS PROGRAM

EVALUATION PROCEDURES: An evaluation and initial Individualized Education Program (IEP)/Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is developed by the agency that refers your child to our program. This agency can be an Intermediate Unit, County Early Intervention provider or School District. In preparation for your child's initial IEP/IFSP, your child is evaluated by at least one educational or therapy professional. All areas of development are addressed. An Evaluation Report (ER) is then compiled which includes the reason for referral, history or update of educational, social and physical status of the child, a summary of evaluation findings, and conclusion and recommendations regarding eligibility and programming needs. Data collection and review of progress will determine when further assessment is needed. The team working with your child will continue to collect information about your child's progress, and this information will be shared with you.

Parents of an eligible young child have the right to obtain an independent educational evaluation. Please refer to your copy of the Procedural Safeguards Notice for more information about independent educational evaluations.

YOUR CHILD'S IEP/IFSP: An IEP/IFSP is an Individualized Education Program for children who are eligible for early intervention services. This is a plan for meeting your child's special learning needs written by you and your child's team. The IEP/IFSP addresses some very important things about your child and what s/he will be doing in school.

A review of each child's program plan is scheduled annually. Easterseals will be involved in the development and annual review of your child's IEP/IFSP, once they are enrolled in our program.

The frequency of therapy provided is based upon your child's educational needs. The term *educational needs* refers to the amount and type of therapy required for your child to participate in his/her educational program, and will be different than medically-based therapy needs.

The IEP/IFSP addresses these questions:

- What skills and abilities does my child have now?
- What can I expect my child to be taught this year?
- What are the strategies or specially designed instruction that will be used to help my child accomplish these learning goals?
- How will my child's learning progress be measured?

Your child's program plan has information in it to answer each of these questions and will be used by everyone working with your child.

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS: Easterseals is a member of the State's Positive Behavior and Intervention Support (PBIS) network. PBIS is a framework for supporting the social and emotional development of our students. The goal of implementing PBIS is to create an environment where every child feels good about coming to school. This is accomplished by designing classroom settings that promote engagement and by building positive relationships among students, families, and school staff. Through the process of PBIS, classroom staff will work together to ensure that children understand behavior expectations, receive instruction in social skills, and those with the most persistent challenging behavior receive individualized assistance. We will use positive approaches when addressing behaviors that interfere with learning. All staff will receive foundation training in PBIS and each of our Easterseals Divisions have established/will establish Core Leadership Teams to provide ongoing support to staff and families regarding PBIS.

Here are a few examples of what to look for in our programs implementing PBIS:

- Emphasis on building caring, responsive relationships with students and families.
- Behavior expectations and rules posted in common areas and classrooms. Behavior expectations and rules are developmentally appropriate and focus on teaching our students what to do (rather than what not to do).
- Safe classroom environments that are designed to promote positive social interactions.
- Positively stated directions and language are used by all program staff. We focus on teaching our children by using positive language such as "walking feet," "quiet voice," and "hands to self."
- Visual aids to assist students are used throughout the day. These may include visual schedules, visual timers, and pictures to remind students of appropriate behavior.
- Emphasis on social emotional skills and development of social skills. Friendship building, emotional vocabulary, anger management, and coping/problem solving skills are incorporated in large and small group activities.

ACCESS TO RECORDS: Easterseals recognizes the family's educational right to review, inspect and copy any educational records related to their child's program here at Easterseals. Easterseals will comply with any written requests from parents within five working days. Easterseals can release any records that were created by our agency for your child which would normally include the IEP/IFSP, therapy and/or educational evaluations, attendance record, and Monthly Service Reports which document therapy provided and progress.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Easterseals respects the privacy of each family we serve and adheres to strict confidentiality guidelines. These include regulations which govern the exchange of educational records (FERPA - Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) and those which deal with protected health information (HIPAA-Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act).

MANDATED REPORTING: Under federal and state laws, Easterseals is required to report any suspected cases of child abuse and/or neglect, and to report any incidents that involve client health and safety. If an investigation is required by State law, it will be conducted by a Certified Investigator.

For more information about mandated reporting, please check the Keep Kids Safe website at www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov/laws.

**** See Appendix# 2 Child Abuse – Protection and Reporting**

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: Easterseals strives to provide an appropriate program for students, and to respond to concerns or disagreements that a parent might have about the school program. Disagreements can occur at any stage in a school program - when initial evaluations are completed, as a comprehensive program is developed and implemented, or as a child completes his/her school program with Easterseals.

The first step in conflict resolution would be to contact the staff working with your child. The Social Worker is also available to facilitate this process, if needed. If no resolution is achieved, the next step would be to contact the Program Coordinator/Director or Division Director.

Under Federal and State Law, parents have specific rights and safeguards in obtaining a free and appropriate public education for their children; these are called "due process rights." A more complete guide for parents entitled The Right to Special Education in Pennsylvania is available from the Disability Rights Network at (800) 692-7443. In addition, whenever a placement or program is started or changed, parents of children in our schools who are three years of age and older will be given a *Procedural Safeguards Notice* issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

For parents of children under the age of five the Office of Child Development and Early Learning has issued an Announcement entitled *Early Intervention Complaint Procedures*. The purpose is to deal with procedures to facilitate the prompt and amicable resolution of disagreements and conflicts among parents, County Administrators, agencies or other parties. This announcement includes a fact sheet on Problem Solving in Early Intervention.

INTERAGENCY COORDINATING COUNCIL

Each county is mandated to have a Local Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC). The ICC is a group of parents and professionals joined in collaboration and coordination of resources to ensure that all children and families in need of early intervention services are identified and receive needed services.

The ICC's purpose is to offer comments and suggestions on the development of local services and supports for children and their families. Parents and professionals work together to communicate directly with the various State Departments involved with education. For more information about your local ICC or State ICC, contact your school Social Worker or Division Director.

GENERAL INFORMATION

CANCELLING A VISIT: If your child is ill or you need to cancel a visit, please call the Easterseals office as soon as possible. It is also important that you cancel your scheduled session, if your child is seen at home, if there is any type of contagious disease in your home. This helps prevent the spread of colds, viruses or infections to other children and families receiving services as well as maintaining the health of Easterseals staff.

HOLIDAY CLOSING: Easterseals is closed for the major holidays. Please refer to the calendar provided for program closures.

MEDICAL UPDATES: Please provide a medical update if your child has any of the following such as :a new evaluation, change in medication, or new information is obtained from a medical specialist or developmental pediatrician



PHILADELPHIA DIVISION AND HEADQUARTERS

YAFFE CENTER

3975 Conshohocken Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19131

PHONE: (215) 879-1000
FAX: (215) 879-8424

EARLY INTERVENTION CENTER

3905 Ford Road
Philadelphia, PA 19131

PHONE: (215)-879-5010
FAX: (215)-879-5051

BUCKS COUNTY DIVISION

BROOKS CENTER

2901 Edgely Road
Levittown, PA 19057

PHONE: (215) 945-7200
FAX: (215) 945-4073

DELAWARE and CHESTER COUNTY DIVISIONS

468 North Middletown Road
Media, PA 19063

PHONE: (610) 565-2353
FAX: (610) 565-5256

MONTGOMERY COUNTY DIVISION

GRESH CENTER

P.O. Box 333
1161 Forty Foot Road
Kulpsville, PA 19443

PHONE: (215) 368-7000
FAX: (215) 368-1199

Accredited by: National Association for the Education of Young Children

Approved by: Pennsylvania Department of Education as an Approved Private School (APS)

Licensed by: Pennsylvania Department of Education's Board of Private Academic Schools

Pennsylvania Department of Human Services as a child care center (Bucks, Delaware County – Marple and Montgomery County sites)

Accreditations vary by location.

Please remove this page, sign, and return to school. Thank you!

I have read and understand the policies and procedures of the Easterseals School/Program as stated in the Parent Handbook for School Year 2022/2023.

CHILD'S NAME: _____

PARENT NAME (please print): _____

PARENT SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

Appendix 1

Easterseals of Southeastern Pennsylvania Operating Policies, Procedures & Practices

**Subject: Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports (PBIS)
Guidance/Discipline**

Section: C Number: 5

It is the policy of Easterseals to use positive behavioral supports for the individuals we serve. Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) is a positive approach to behavior support that focuses on utilizing strategies that prevent challenging behavior. PBIS provides staff the skills to ensure that all individuals are free from demeaning treatment including coercion, psychological abuse, physical punishment, the use of aversive techniques and the unreasonable use of restraints. It is our goal to utilize PBIS to limit or eliminate the use of suspension, expulsion and other exclusionary measures in compliance with federal and state civil rights laws.

Exclusionary measures (as defined within this document) are never considered until all other possible interventions have been exhausted. The variety of techniques used help to develop and maintain positive social skills will enhance the child's opportunity for learning, self-fulfillment and independence. The use of restraints are prohibited except in emergency situations where a child is in imminent risk of harm to themselves or others, there is no other way to prevent that harm, and the risk of not intervening is greater than the risk of intervening.

Staff is trained in Safety Care crisis prevention. The focus is on prevention, safety, and supportive evidence-based interventions.

Definitions [PA Regulations 14.133(b)]

With regards to a child's behavior, the following words and terms when used in this policy have the following meanings, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

- Aversive techniques – Deliberate activities designed to establish a negative association with a specific behavior.
- Behavior support – The development, change and maintenance of selected behaviors through the systematic application of behavior change techniques.
- Positive techniques – Methods which utilize positive reinforcement to shape an eligible young child's behavior, that range from the use of positive verbal statements as a reward for good behavior to specific tangible rewards.

- Restraints – the application of physical force, with or without the use of a device for the purpose of restraining the free movement of a student. The term includes physical and mechanical restraints.

Positive Strategies {PA Regulations 14.133 (a) }

Positive learner behaviors are vital components in the achievement of education success for all children. Inappropriate behavior may negatively impact on the programming for an individual. When behavior interferes with productive learning, a plan to address the behavior is needed. The promotion of social emotional development and the following positive approaches are to be considered when addressing behavior concerns:

- Proactive classroom management techniques such as: clear rules and procedures, effective teaching practices, natural reinforcements and consequences, direct instruction of desired skill, frequent monitoring, environmental adaptations, and curriculum adaptation.
- Positive social behavior strategies such as: adult/peer modeling, cueing, use of social stories.
- Behavioral techniques such as: manipulation of antecedents and consequences, systematic reinforcement, redirection, and ongoing communication between home and school.

Behavior Support Plan

In those situations where an individual may not respond universal/tier one positive behavioral preventative strategies and more support is needed to address the challenging behavior, the team will develop positive behavior strategies or a Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP) that addresses the identified function (s) of the challenging behavior. Depending upon the individual situation, the development of this plan would be preceded by either an informal or formal behavior assessment of the child. The process would include the following steps:

- Review of any educational records
- Interview with families and teacher in regards to history of challenging behavior, daily routines, and strategies already in place
- Identify the behavior (s) of concern
- Gather information/data about the target behavior
- Develop hypothesis about the function of the behavior
- Design an intervention plan
- Implement the plan and collect data on effectiveness
- Modify plan as required
- Fade support according to plan hierarchy

The plan needs to include safety procedures for situations when a child may be of harm to themselves or others.

Prohibited Staff Practices

There are no circumstances when it is permissible to use the following practices as defined below:

- **Physical Punishment:** Shaking, hitting, spanking, slapping, jerking, squeezing, kicking, biting, pinching, excessive tickling, and pulling of arms, hair, or ears; requiring a child to remain inactive for a long period of time.
- **Psychological abuse:** shaming, name calling, ridiculing, humiliation, sarcasm, cursing at, making threats, or frightening a child; ostracism, withholding affection.
- **Coercion:** Rough handling (shoving, pulling, pushing, grasping any body part); forcing a child to sit down, lie down, or stay down, except when restraint is necessary to protect the child or others from harm; physically forcing a child to perform an action (such as eating or cleaning up).

Restraints [PA Regulations 14.133(c)]

Chapter 14.133(c) defines restraints as the application of physical force, with or without the use of a device for the purpose of restraining the free movement of a student. The term does not include briefly holding, without force, a child to calm or comfort them; guide a child to an appropriate activity or holding a child's hand to safely escort them from one area to another.

The term does not include hand over hand assistance with feeding or task completion and techniques prescribed by a qualified medical professional for reasons of safety or for therapeutic or medical treatment, as agreed to by the child's parent as documented on the child's *Therapeutic Positioning Agreement* and specified in the IEP.

The use of restraints are prohibited except in emergency situations where a child is in imminent risk of harm to themselves or others, there is no other way to prevent that harm, and the risk of not intervening is greater than the risk of intervening. If a child meets the criteria, staff trained in Safety Care will intervene. Safety Care is behavioral safety training for staff who work with children who exhibit challenging behavior.

If restraints are used, a meeting of the IEP team must convene within 10 days to review the current IEP for appropriateness and effectiveness. The use of restraints will not be included in the IEP for the convenience of staff, as a substitute for an educational program, or employed as punishment. When a restraint has been used, parents shall be contacted as soon as possible, but no more than one program day following the incident. The IEP team must convene within 10 days, unless the parent waives the meeting in

writing. Following the use of any restraint, the Bureau of Early Intervention needs to be notified within 48 hours and the Incident Reporting form needs to be sent (attached).

Any time a restraint is used, it will be treated as a reportable incident as defined in the agency's incident management policy.

Mechanical Restraints [PA Regulations 14.133(d)]

Mechanical restraints, which are used to control involuntary movement or lack of muscular control of an individual when due to organic causes or conditions, may be employed only when specified by an IEP and as determined by a medical professional qualified to make the determination, and as agreed to by an individual's parents. Mechanical restraints shall prevent an individual from injuring him/herself or others or promote normative body positioning and physical functions.

Training

Easterseals will train all staff annually as a proactive measure to reduce the probability of using restraints. Safety Care training focuses on positive behavioral strategies and using safety techniques that protect as well as minimize the risk of injury to the staff and the individuals.

Suspension and Expulsion

Our goal is also to limit or eliminate the use of suspension, expulsion and other exclusionary measures in compliance with federal and state civil rights laws.

All of the following actions are included in this definition of suspension:

1. Excluding a child from the classroom, whether by placing him/her in another part of the building, or excluding the child from the building;
2. Sending a child home early or limiting the number of hours per day (s)he can attend; or
3. Un-enrolling a child because (s)he is "not a good fit" with the program.

The only circumstances in which our actions may be included in this definition for children with IEP's are:

1. If a child is displaying unsafe behavior, we may need to remove vulnerable peers from the immediate location which may include leaving the classroom.
2. The IEP team (which includes school staff, child's family, LEA representative, and outside providers at discretion of parent) may discuss hours per day a child attends based on developmental appropriateness.

Our programs include some children with typical development. If those children start to display persistent challenging behavior the following steps will be taken:

1. Families will be communicated with ongoing in regards to positive and negative behavior at school.

2. Easterseals internal behavioral supports team will be notified and PBIS tier 2 strategies will be put into place and communicated to classroom staff and family.
3. School staff and family will meet if tier 2 strategies are not effective (based on data collection) and outside referrals will be discussed (wraparound/CBH, Early Intervention Evaluation).
4. Depending on outcome (s) of outside referrals, appropriateness of classroom placement may be discussed. Internal behavior supports team will collaborate with any outside behavioral supports in order to ensure consistency of intervention.

Family Support

Although it is our goal to limit or eliminate the use of suspension, expulsion and other exclusionary measures, should it become necessary our team would assist family by providing any necessary support and information in order to facilitate a successful transition.

Detailed information about Easter Seals behavior policies and practices are communicated to parents upon enrollment in the program and on an annual basis.

References:

PaTTAN website “EI Program Guidance for Developing a Behavior Support Policy”

OCDEL Announcement:EI 12 #06

NAEYC Program Portfolio Tool, June 2018