



Parent Handbook

2021-2022

Easterseals Early Learning Services
Chicago and Suburban Cook County
4415 Harrison Street, Suite 510
Hillside, IL 60162
Phone: 708-330-4490

This page left blank intentionally

Table of Contents

TOPIC	PAGE(S)
Overview	4-6
Parent Engagement and Involvement	6-7
School Readiness Goals	8
No Fee Policy	8
Continuity of Enrollment	8
Guidance/Discipline Policy	9-10
Suspension and Expulsion	10
Mandated Reporting	10
Code of Conduct	11
Confidentiality	12
Concern Procedure	12-13
Pedestrian Safety	14
Notes	15

Welcome to Easterseals Metropolitan Chicago Early Learning Services

Welcome to our Early Learning Services, where you, your child, and every member of your family are very important to us. The purpose of this handbook is to give you some basic information. This Parent Handbook includes information on program options, services, activities, policies and procedures, and our mutual responsibilities. Information for the specific program your child is in will be given in a separate handout. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

What Are Our Early Learning Services?

Our Early Learning Services are comprehensive child and family development programs for pregnant women and children ages birth to five and their families. They include Head Start (HS), Early Head Start (EHS), Prevention Initiative (PI) and Preschool for All (PFA). These programs promote school readiness and future success for children and accomplishes this through family partnerships and parent engagement. Our staff works closely with all our families to ensure that every family feels heard, supported, valued, and has a sense of belonging to a community.

What services are provided?

Educational Activities
Developmental Screenings
Healthy Meals and Snacks
Health and Nutrition Services
Family Support and Referrals
Qualified Teachers in each classroom
Parent and Family Engagement Activities and Services
Access to a Nutritionist and Social-Emotional Specialist/Consultant

Easterseals Early Learning Services

Easterseals Early Learning Services (EELS) offers both home based and center based services through one directly operated center and partnerships with private childcare centers. In Chicago EELS operates as a delegate of the City of Chicago's Department of Family and Support Services and in the South and West Suburbs of Cook County EELS is a grantee through the Office of Head Start. Easterseals also receives funding from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to provide Prevention Initiative (PI) and Preschool for All (PFA) services in suburban Cook County.

■ In Chicago:

- We serve over 200 children ages 3-5 in Head Start, and nearly 200 children ages 0-3 in Early Head Start and Early Head Start Child Care Partnership.
- In-person HS and EHS services are 7.5 hours per day, 12 months per year; EHS CCP is 10 hours per day, 12 months per year. Virtual Services are 2.5 hours combination of live events and at-home activities per day.
- EHS Home Based is offered on two caseloads serving families on the south side.

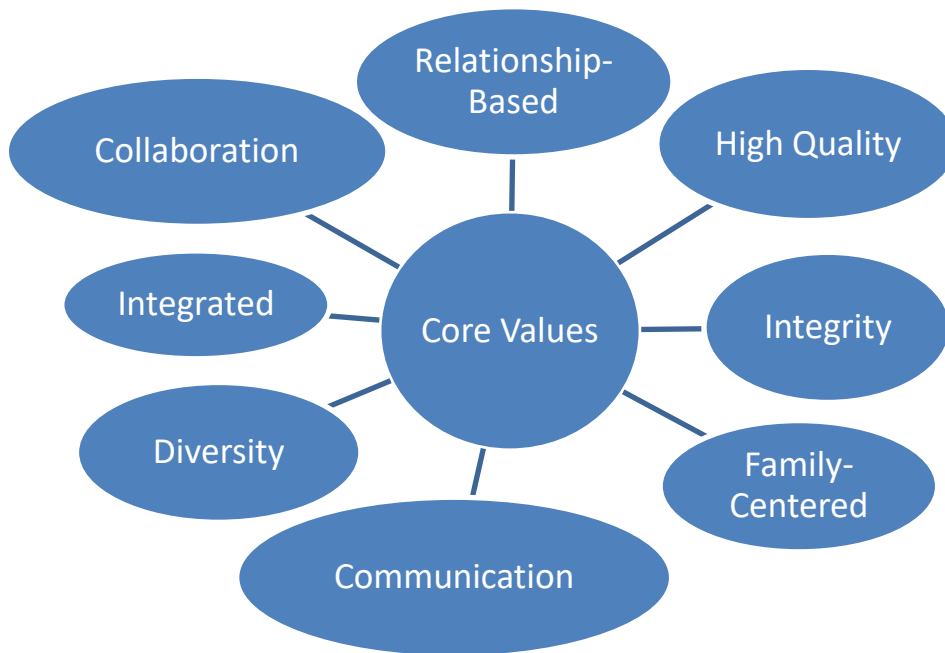
■ In Suburban Cook County:

- We serve 547 children ages 3-5 in Head Start and 472 children ages 0-3 in Early Head Start.
- In-person Center Based HS and EHS are both 7 hours per day, 12 months per year. Virtual services are 2.5 hours combination of live events and at-home activities per day.
- Prevention Initiative services are provided for about 300 of our center based children ages 0-3.
- Preschool for All services are provided for over 300 of our center based 3-5 aged children.
- EHS Home Based is offered in suburban Cook County through two programs that serve families in the South and West suburbs. Home Based Educators deliver EHS services through weekly 90-minute home visits with the parent and child and twice-monthly group socialization experiences, 12 months per year with a minimum of 46 visits per year.
- Pregnant women are served through EHS Home Based. Infants born to enrolled pregnant women can transition to either home based or center based EHS based on parent preference and available vacancies.

Mission Statement

We are a non-profit, community-based Early Learning partnership program that recognizes individual strengths and empowers children and their families that have limited access to resources. Through supportive collaborations with private early childhood programs, our integrated teams provide hands-on, comprehensive quality services to give children and their families the opportunity for a brighter future and a head start to success.

Core values



Parent Engagement and Involvement

The relationship between parents and the program is crucial for all that we do. Parents are the primary educator and advocate for their own children. Our Early Learning Services staff will walk alongside you in your role as parent while your child is enrolled in the program. You will be encouraged to take an active role in the services provided to your child and family. You will be invited to participate...

- At enrollment by giving us information that will help us provide you and your child support
- In home visits
- In planning for your child's transitions
- To volunteer in the program
- To take leadership in the program
- In at-home learning activities for you and your child
- In completing a family assessment
- In developing individualized goals for you and your child

Parent involvement in program governance

Parent Committee (at each site or for the Home Based program)

- Made up of all the Head Start/Early Head Start parents at the site or in the home based program
- Meetings are held at least quarterly
- The Parent Committee elects officers (Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary) who take a leadership role at meetings and at the site
- The Parent Committee works in partnership with key site staff to contribute to decision-making and planning at the site level regarding parent activity funds, curriculum, etc.
- The Parent Committee also elects a Parent Representative to the agency-wide Policy Council (Suburban) or delegate-wide Parent Policy Committee (Chicago)

Policy Council (agency-wide) for Suburban or Parent Policy Committee for Chicago

Made up of a Parent Representative elected by parents from each Easterseals Head Start/Early Head Start partner site and from each home based program, as well as community representatives

- If a site has both Head Start and Early Head Start, parents elect a Head Start Parent Representative, and also an EHS Parent Representative
- Meetings are held monthly at a central location
- The Policy Council/Committee elects officers (Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Secretary) who take a leadership role at meetings and in the program
- The Parent Policy Council/Committee works in partnership with key management staff to be informed, develop, review, and approve or disapprove the following policies and procedures and submit decisions to the governing body (Easterseals Board of Directors) regarding:
 - Activities for parent involvement/engagement
 - Program recruitment, selection, and enrollment priorities
 - Funding applications/amendments
 - Budget planning, including reimbursement and participation in Parent Policy Council/Committee activities
 - Personnel policies and decisions, including criteria for employment and dismissal of program staff
 - Recommendations on partner sites
- The Parent Policy Committee (Chicago) also elects a delegate and alternate to the Chicago Citywide Parent Policy Council.

Responsibilities of Parent Representative to the Policy Council/Committee:

- Attend all Policy Council/Committee meetings
- Share information and decisions from the Policy Council/Committee with the site Parent Committee
- Bring relevant parent questions, issues and ideas from the site Parent Committee to the Policy Council/Committee
- Encourage parent participation at all levels of the program



School Readiness Goals

Easterseals Early Learning Service's Approach to School Readiness means that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children. Our Early Learning programs encompass a strong, clear and comprehensive focus on all aspects of healthy development, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional development all of which are essential to children getting ready for school. In collaboration with our private child care partner centers, Easterseals Early Learning Services has established school readiness goals which include the expectations of children's status and progress across domains of approaches to learning, social and emotional development, language and communication, cognition, and perceptual motor and physical development, that will improve readiness for kindergarten ensuring children possess the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life. For parents and families, school readiness means they are engaged in the long term, lifelong success of their child. Early Learning Services recognizes parents are their children's primary teacher and advocate. **The program consults with parents to establish program, school readiness, parent, family, and community engagement goals. These groups work together to promote school readiness and to engage school systems and families as their children make the transition to kindergarten (see handout).**

No Fee Policy

Families enrolled in Easterseals Early Learning Services (HS/EHS/PFA/PI) cannot be charged fees, including registration fees or fees for field trips, or be required to do any kind of fundraising or to bring supplies.

For families that have the Child Care Assistance Program subsidy (through Action for Children or DFSS), the co-payment is an allowable fee.

Continuity of Enrollment

We make every effort to continue a child's enrollment within the guidelines for Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS).

For **Head Start**, an eligible child can continue enrollment for the program year that they start and into the next program year (a program year generally starts in September and end in August). We must reverify eligibility for a child to continue for a 3rd year.

For **Early Head Start**, an eligible child remains eligible as long as she/he is enrolled until she/he ages out (age 3). When transitioning to Head Start, we need to verify eligibility again.

Guidance/Discipline Policy

During the first five years of life, children are just beginning to learn how to self-regulate and handle their own emotions, therefore teachers and center staff must guide and support children to navigate challenges in the classroom. It is the responsibility of center staff to ensure classrooms are safe environment's that support positive social and emotional growth of children. Therefore challenging behavior must be addressed in a manner that supports child development.

Challenging behavior is defined as a behavior that:

- interfere with a child's learning, development and success in play and building friendships
- is harmful to the child, other children or adults
- puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure

Challenging behavior can be direct behaviors such as hitting, kicking, pushing biting or in direct such as teasing, ignoring rules or instructions, excluding others, name calling, destroying objects, tantrums etc.

Discipline and guidance will never:

- Be punitive
- Physical
- Used to deny children of activities, food, rest or exclude them from their peers

Adults model positive behavior- teachers and center staff should model cooperation and positive talk.

The physical environment is designed to minimize conflict-

- Classroom areas should be clearly defined so children will know what areas they can go to for activities.
- A quiet/calming area will be designated for children to use.
- Materials should be accessible and ready for children to use.
- Center staff should provide multiples of popular items.
- The classroom should be designed to discourage running (no large open areas) and children can be seen at all times.
- Visuals should be posted around the room to reinforce rules and expectations

Teachers maintain age appropriate expectations for children.

- Teachers will ensure children do not have extended wait times.
- Teachers will limit the length of large group times and teacher directed activities.
- Children should be given large blocks of time to choose activities.

Teachers closely observe and supervise children's activities and interactions.

Teachers help children verbalize their feelings, frustrations, and concerns.

- Teachers will help children to understand their feelings through conversations, language modeling, stories, pictures, visuals, feeling check-ins etc.
- Teachers will describe problems, brain-storm solutions and talk about consequences of our actions.
- Teachers will encourage children to solve their own problems in a positive way through the use of strategies such as the Pyramid solutions tool kit and teacher modeling.
- Teachers will show children that cooperation and teamwork is valued through daily interactions with the children, parents, and coworkers.

(Guidance/Discipline Policy continued on next page)

When teacher intervention is necessary, teachers will use respect.

- Teachers will use developmentally appropriate strategies such as redirection, natural consequences, appropriate choices, and positive reinforcement.
- No child will ever be humiliated, shamed, made to feel frightened, or subjected to physical or verbal abuse by any staff member.
- Food, water, rest, and bathroom privileges can never be withheld due to a child's behavior.
- Teachers and staff will not place children in "time out" or exclude children from activities such as large group times or outdoor play.
- Teachers and staff will not threaten to send children home or to send a negative report home.
- Calm areas equipped with various materials and resources will be accessible with items such as social emotional books, fidgets, visuals that guide children in the calm down process etc.
- Teachers will partner with families and Easterseals staff to determine possible causes of behavior in an effort to assist the child in the future and prevent behaviors.

Ongoing Challenging Behavior/ Dangerous Behavior

- Teachers will follow the Behavior Review Process for any children that have ongoing challenging behavior or behavior that is harmful to themselves or others.

For consistency, when in the center or on the grounds, parents and family members are expected to follow this guidance/discipline policy in disciplining their own children.

All staff and volunteers must follow this guidance/discipline policy at all times.

Suspension and Expulsion

Children cannot be suspended or expelled from any Easterseals Early Learning Services program activity such as field trips, walks, playground or special activities due to challenging behavior. Teachers and staff will work collaboratively with families to provide solutions to assist children who are struggling with challenging behavior.

Mandated Reporting

All Easterseals Early Learning Services staff, as well as all staff employed in a childcare setting, are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse or neglect. This means that they are required by law to report suspected child maltreatment immediately to the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) when they have "reasonable cause to believe" that a child known to them in their professional capacity may be an abused or neglected child. Every effort will be made to discuss the situation with the family prior to making a report. The center may not interfere with DCFS proceedings. If a caseworker comes out to visit a child, they will be allowed to do so. Each year, staff receives training on recognizing signs of possible abuse or neglect.

The DCFS Hotline number is: 1-800-252-2873 (1-800-25ABUSE)

Code of Conduct for Staff and Parent/Guardian (Volunteer)

As a staff person, consultant, contractor, or volunteer supporting the Early Learning Services Program, all will abide by the Easterseals Standards of Conduct as listed below:

- (i) Implement positive strategies to support children's well-being and prevent and address challenging behavior;
- (ii) Will not maltreat or endanger the health or safety of children, including, at a minimum, that I must not:
 - (A) Use corporal punishment;
 - (B) Use isolation to discipline a child;
 - (C) Bind or tie a child to restrict movement or tape a child's mouth;
 - (D) Use or withhold food as a punishment or reward;
 - (E) Use toilet learning/training methods that punish, demean, or humiliate a child;
 - (F) Use any form of emotional abuse, including public or private humiliation, rejecting, terrorizing, extended ignoring, or corrupting a child;
 - (G) Physically abuse a child;
 - (H) Use any form of verbal abuse, including profane, sarcastic language, threats, or derogatory remarks about the child or child's family; or,
 - (I) Use physical activity or outdoor time as a punishment or reward;
- i. I will respect and promote the unique identity of each child and family and do not stereotype on any basis, including gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or family composition;
- ii. I will comply with program confidentiality policies concerning personally identifiable information about children, families, and other staff members in accordance with subpart C of part 1303 of this chapter and applicable federal, state, local, and tribal laws; and,
- iii. I will ensure no child is ever left alone or unsupervised.
- iv. I will not solicit or accept personal gratuities, favors, or anything of significant monetary value from contractors or potential contractors.
- v. I will adhere to the Head Start Performance Standards, Head Start Act, and Easterseals policies and procedures in determining eligibility, verifying eligibility information, and maintaining an accurate eligibility determination record for all children and pregnant women enrolled in the Head Start or Early Head Start program.
- vi. I will not solicit or accept personal gratuities, favors, or anything of significant monetary value from potential Head Start/EHS families.
- vii. I will not complete eligibility for the following relatives: Husband, Father, Mother, Brother, Sister, Son, Daughter, Father-in-law, Mother-in-law, Sister-in-law, Brother-in-law, Step-parents, Step-parents in-law.

I understand that Head Start/Early Head Start services are paid for with federal funds and that intentionally providing misleading, inaccurate or untruthful information of a material nature could have serious legal consequences.

In the event that the Standards of Conduct are violated, I can be subjected to disciplinary actions up to and including termination of employment/contract.

Confidentiality

The Easterseals Early Learning Services programs will ensure confidentiality and privacy regarding services, records and discussions of or about any person or child served by the program. Part of protecting the confidentiality of children and families requires that staff only communicate with parents and/or legal guardians. Sharing personal information with any third party requires the express written permission of the parent and/or guardian with a few exceptions. We share information with consultants who have a legitimate need for the information to provide services to the child or family. For example, we may have a Social Emotional Specialist that is going to provide services to the family. We will also share information with the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services in situations where we suspect child abuse or neglect, in which case we are mandated reporters. We also may share personally identifying information to consultants or regulatory representatives as part of a self-assessment or program audit. We may also share confidential information if it is included as part of a court order request.

You have rights under our confidentiality policy.

- You have the right to inspect your child's records. We will make the records available no more than 45 days after you request them.
- If you believe your child's record contains errors, you have the right to request that we correct the information.
- If we do not correct the record to your satisfaction, you have the right to request a hearing and we will schedule a hearing with an impartial arbiter.
- You have the right to a copy of your child's record.
- Finally, you have the right to inspect written agreements that we have with third parties.

Concern Procedure

We hope that no family enrolled in Easterseals Early Learning Services or community member ever has a reason to be unhappy with our services, but we recognize that there may come a time when someone feels the need to address a concern.

It is important that questions, concerns, ideas and problems be dealt with in a positive manner. We hope that parents and community members feel comfortable expressing their concerns directly to the individual involved. Most problems can be resolved with direct, positive, problem-solving focused communication. Every attempt should be made to handle the situation directly. After communications have been attempted with the person involved, if the situation is still unresolved, the concern should be put in writing.

The written concern will be submitted online at www.easterseals.com/chicago/concernform (a paper version will be provided upon request). The concern will be reviewed by Easterseals Early Learning Services. The parent may be contacted to provide additional clarifying information. If the issue can be resolved through this conversation, the parent will be provided a written summary of the conversation within 10 business days of the conversation.

(Concern Policy Continued on next page)

Most concerns that are not resolved will be passed on to the site team where those needed to resolve the issue will be involved.

If the concern involves an Easterseals employee, the concern may be passed on to that person's immediate supervisor. The supervisor may contact the parent and attempt to resolve the concern between the parent and the staff person involved.

A written response will be prepared by Easterseals Early Learning staff outlining action taken and given to Parent and/or Parent Committee Chairperson within ten (10) working days of the meeting or conversation.

If the Parent/Community member(s) and/or Parent Center Committee is not satisfied with the written response, the Parent/Community member(s) may request a joint meeting of the Policy Council for final resolution of the concern/problem through a written request to the Policy Council/Committee Chairperson. The chief operating officer of Easterseals will also be notified of the situation. A meeting will be scheduled to address the issue within 30 days of receiving the request. The action recommended by the Policy Council/Committee as a result of the meeting will be reported to the Board of Directors.

Pedestrian Safety

Pedestrian safety education must be provided to children and parents within the first 30 days of the program year.

In addition to emergency evacuation procedures, it is critical for children to learn and practice safety procedures on:

- safe riding practices
- boarding and leaving a vehicle
- crossing the street
- danger zones around a vehicle

Helping parents to reinforce safety procedures with their children can be introduced during a parent training. They can also practice vehicle safety as the family uses public transportation or their own vehicle. Parents are important as the child learns to avoid danger in their environment.

Pedestrian Safety: Do's and Don'ts

Teach your children:

1. Do not cross the street alone if you're younger than 10 years old.
2. Do stop at the curb before crossing the street.
3. Don't run, across the street, walk.
4. Do cross at corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks.
5. Hold an adult's hand when crossing the street. Do look left, right, and left again before crossing.
6. Do walk facing traffic.
7. Do not play in driveway, streets, parking lots or unfenced yards by the street.
8. Wear white clothing or reflector when walking at night
9. Only cross in front of a school bus when the driver says it is safe. Do not cross behind the bus or where the driver can't see you.
10. If a toy or pet goes out into the street, ask an adult for help getting it back.



For more safety information visit www.safekids.org

Notes