Welcome to Easterseals Head Start and Early Head Start!

Welcome to our Early Head Start and Head Start Programs, where you, your child, and every member of your family are very important to us. The purpose of this handbook is to present to you some basic information. This Parent Handbook includes information on program options, services, activities, policies and procedures, and our mutual responsibilities. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

**Easterseals Head Start/Early Head Start Services – Chicago**
120 Madison Street
Oak Park, IL 60302
Phone: 708-334-2525

**Easterseals Head Start/Early Head Start Services – Suburban Cook County**
4415 Harrison Street, Suite 510
Hillside, IL 60162
Phone: 708-330-4490

What is Head Start?

Head Start/Early Head Start is a comprehensive child and family development program for pregnant women and children ages birth to five and their families. Head Start promotes 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
Social, health and dental services
Parent involvement
Qualified Teachers in each Head Start and Early Head Start classroom
Access to a Nutritionist and Mental Health Consultant

Easterseals Head Start/Early Head Start Program

Easterseals partners with private childcare centers in Chicago (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 (as a grantee through the Office of Head Start) to provide the Head Start and Early Head Start program. Each site designates a daily schedule of “HS/EHS hours” during which the HS/EHS qualified teaching staff are in the classrooms and the HS/EHS group sizes and ratios are followed.

- In Chicago:
  - We serve over 400 children ages 3-5 in Head Start, and over 200 children ages 0-3 in Early Head Start and Early Head Start Child Care Partnership.
  - HS is 3 ½ hours per day, 10 months per year; EHS is 6 hours per day, 12 months per year; EHS CCP is 10 hours per day, 12 months per year.

- In Suburban Cook County:
  - We serve 547 children ages 3-5 in Head Start and 472 children ages 0-3 in Early Head Start.
  - Center Based HS and EHS are both 6 hours per day, 12 months per year.
  - EHS Home Based is offered in suburban Cook County through partnership with two agencies that serve families in the South, West, and North suburbs. Parent-Child Educators deliver EHS services through weekly 90-minutes home visits with the parent and child and twice-monthly group socialization experiences, 12 months 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.
Mission Statement

We are a non-profit, community-based Head Start and Early Head Start 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

Core Values
- Relationship-Based
- High Quality
- Integrity
- Family-Centered
- Communication
- Diversity
- Integrated

The Head Start Team

Easterseals and partnership centers work together to deliver comprehensive quality services with our hands-on integrated teams. The Head Start Teams and their services are listed below:

Family and Health Advocate Team

This team works with partnering centers and families to promote healthy parent involvement.
Advocates meet with each family at the beginning of each program year to complete the family needs assessment. Through this process the family then forms goals with the advocate. The advocate and family work collaboratively to accomplish these goals through various referrals. The families also have the opportunity to hold office on the site-level parent committee as well as the agency-wide parent policy committee. This team also collaborates with local health and dental providers, registered nutritionists/dieticians (a qualified nutrition consultant is assigned to each site), and the Chicago Department of Public Health to ensure all enrolled Head Start children receive age-appropriate health services and developmental screenings.

**Family support principles**

- All families need support
- Each family is unique
- The goal of working with families is to strengthen, not substitute for, family responsibilities
- Children and families benefit most from family-centered services
- Healthy families do not live in isolation—they are part of larger systems

**Family & Community Partnerships**

- From the first contact with the family, begin to build a relationship of respect and trust
- Family partnership agreement: family strengths and needs assessment, and inviting the parent(s) to share their goals
- Referrals and resources (housing, job training, free activity workshops, behavioral health counseling)
- Year-round recruitment/marketing, and building relationships and linkages with community organizations
- Coordinate family engagement activities (workshops, field trips, stress management, parent meetings and other community activities)
- Collaborate with schools and with families on transition to kindergarten activities

**Health**

- Track and support families in obtaining physicals, dentals, immunizations, and all health screenings according to recommended EPSDT schedule
- Measure children's height and weight twice a year.
- Reinforce family-style meal services and dental hygiene; work with families on nutrition and alternate food plan.
- Develop cooperative relationship with local health professionals.
**Nutrition Services**

- Certified/licensed nutritionist reviews site menus to ensure nutritious foods are offered to Head Start/Early Head Start children
- Nutritionist offer alternate food plan to children who need special diet
- A Nutrition action plan is offered to children with weight issues
- Health staff help parents communicate with nutritionist when they need consultation about nutrition services
- Nutrition workshop are provided for staff and parents
- Help any child with nutritional needs

**Education and Inclusion Team**

This team partners with teachers, parents, and directors to ensure that classrooms are safe, nurturing, and engaging learning environments for children. The team’s role is to coach and mentor teachers in the classroom through relationship building, modeling, offering recommendations and ideas and providing professional development. The Education/Inclusion team also plays a vital role in ensuring all children, including children with diagnosed disabilities, are fully included in program activities. This is implemented through individualization, referrals to outside resources, trainings, and transition planning with teachers and parents.

**Defining School readiness**

- Head Start defines its approach to School Readiness as meaning that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children.
- Head Start views school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life.
- Programs must establish school readiness goals that are appropriate for the ages and development of enrolled children.
- Measuring progress toward school readiness goals helps programs individualize for each child and ensure that children know and can do what is needed to be ready for kindergarten.
- Head Start respects parents as their children's primary nurturers, teachers, and advocates. Programs are required to consult with parents in establishing school readiness goals.
- As children transition to kindergarten, Head Start programs and schools should work together to promote school readiness and engage families.
Education

- All classrooms use the Creative Curriculum, which is research-based and aligned with state early learning standards.
- Assessments are ongoing and utilize observations, pictures, videos, audio recordings, and examples of children’s work to demonstrate children’s competencies in a variety of learning domains determined essential for school readiness.
- After four checkpoints a year, the results are analyzed and used to guide planning, individualization, and professional development.
- There are two home visits and two parent-teacher conferences per year.

Inclusion

- All children receive regular developmental screenings to look at overall development, social-emotional development, and hearing/vision and to determine if further evaluation is needed.
- If there are any concerns identified, children are referred to the appropriate agencies and supported through the evaluation process.
- Children with pre-diagnosed disabilities are included in the classroom along with typically developing peers.
- At least 10% of enrollment must be children with disabilities.

Mental Health Team

A qualified mental health consultant is assigned to each site. The consultant performs general classroom observations on the children, staff, and atmosphere and provides training and guidance on social-emotional development. The consultant also conducts individual observations of children as requested by parents and staff and offers suggestions on strategies for working with the child in the classroom and at home. Each family has access to 3 crisis counseling sessions, and the mental health consultant can refer families for outside services when needed.
§ 1305.9 Policy on fees.

A Head Start program must not prescribe any fee schedule or otherwise provide for the charging of any fees for participation in the program. If the family of a child determined to be eligible for participation by a Head Start program volunteers to pay part or all of the costs of the child’s participation, the Head Start program may accept the voluntary payments and record the payments as program income. Under no circumstances shall a Head Start program solicit, encourage, or in any other way condition a child’s enrollment or participation in the program upon the payment of a fee.

HS/EHS parents cannot be charged fees, including registration fees and fees for field trips, or be required to do any kind of fundraising or to bring supplies.

HS/EHS parents that have the Child Care Assistance Program subsidy (through Action for Children or DFSS) are required to pay their co-payment.

If a HS/EHS parent loses their child care eligibility (for instance, due to loss of employment), they may still attend the HS/EHS hours at the center, but parents must pick up their child at the end of those hours. The family and health advocates, through referrals and support, will assist the parent with their goal of finding new employment, entering a job training program, or enrolling in school, and becoming child care eligible again.

§ 1305.7 Enrollment and Re-Enrollment.

(a) Each child enrolled in a Head Start program, except those enrolled in a migrant program, must be allowed to remain in Head Start until kindergarten or first grade is available for the child in the child’s community, except that the Head Start program may choose not to enroll a child when there are compelling reasons for the child not to remain in Head Start, such as when there is a change in the child’s family income and there is a child with a greater need for Head Start services.
Mandated Reporting

All Head Start and Early Head Start staff, as well as all staff employed in a child care 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)

Confidentiality

Easterseals Head Start/Early Head Start complies with all federal and state guidelines in ensuring the confidentiality of all education, social services, health and other pertinent information:

- All files are maintained in locked cabinets, and are accessible only to the staff persons immediately involved to providing services to the child and family.
- Files are the property of Easterseals Head Start/Early Head Start, but they contain information to which the child’s parents have access. Parents may review their child’s file after making an appointment to do so with their Family and Health Advocate, and may also request copies of records on an as needed basis.
- Child and family information is also entered into the online COPA database and the Teaching Strategies GOLD online database.
- No information about a child/family may be released to another agency without the prior written consent of the child’s parent/guardian.
- In the case of suspected child abuse or neglect, information must be released with or without prior parental permission, as per Illinois state law, to DCFS and/or law enforcement authorities.

Staff and contracted consultants are required to treat information about children and families responsibly and with discretion. Strong disciplinary action will be taken in the case of breaches of confidentiality.
Parent Involvement in Program Governance

**Parent Committee (at each site)**

- Made up of all the Head Start/Early Head Start parents at the site
- Meetings are held quarterly at a minimum at the site
- 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 and a Parent Alternate to the agency-wide Policy Council (Suburban) or Parent Policy Committee (Chicago)

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

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

- If a site has both Head Start and Early Head Start, parents elect a Head Start Parent Representative and Alternate, and also a EHS Parent Representative and Alternate
- 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 Policy Council/Committee works in partnership with key management staff in order to be informed, develop, review and approve or disapprove the following policies and procedures:
  - Planning
    - Long and short-range program goals and objectives
    - Criteria for determining recruitment, selection and enrollment priorities
    - Funding applications for Head Start/Early Head Start
    - The annual Program Self-Assessment process
  - General Procedures
    - The composition of the Policy Council/Committee and how members are chosen
    - Shared decision-making with the Easterseals Board of Directors
    - Internal dispute resolution and impasse procedures
  - Human Resources Management
    - Program personnel policies and changes
    - Decisions to hire and terminate Head Start/Early Head Start staff
- The Parent Policy Committee (Chicago) also elects a delegate and alternate to the Chicago Citywide Parent Policy Council.

**Responsibilities of Parent Representative and Alternates 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
# Center Based Enrollment Agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will drop-off and pick-up my child on time on all scheduled school days. The Head Start/EHS hours are ______am to ______pm.</td>
<td>We will welcome you and your child every day and will inform you of any schedule or calendar changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will notify the center if my child must be absent and provide the reason for the absence.</td>
<td>If we don’t hear from you, we will contact you and/or your emergency contacts to determine why your child is absent. Your child’s attendance is important to us!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that consistent attendance is required and that lack of consistent attendance will result in re-evaluation of enrollment.</td>
<td>We will try to accommodate family schedule changes to encourage attendance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that if my child’s participation falls below 85% or if my child is absent three or more consecutive days, I will meet with staff to determine resolutions.</td>
<td>We will meet with you if your child is absent three consecutive or more days to determine ways that the attendance can be resolved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that if my child is absent for 8 consecutive days with no reason or contact with the program, my child will be removed from the program.</td>
<td>We will try to contact you and all of the emergency contacts prior to removing the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will participate in a Family Assessment, Family Partnership agreement and speak with the Family and Health Advocate at least monthly.</td>
<td>We will provide information, referrals and assistance to assist families in achieving goals that address family’s needs and interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will participate during the week in at-home activities we have developed and planned specifically for my child.</td>
<td>We will work together to plan and develop activities specifically for you and your child based on the teacher’s lesson plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that physical exams, dentals and follow-up must be current. I will keep appointments and share the paperwork with the Family and Health Advocate. Head Start requires up-to-date health and wellness to ensure the best outcomes for the children.</td>
<td>We will help you locate a primary care physician and dentist, if you don’t have one for your child. We will remind you and ask you for a copy of the completed forms when your child visits the physician or dentist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that I will be expected to obtain the required state mandated immunizations and medical tests.</td>
<td>We will share with you the immunization schedule and provide any information necessary to help you acquire the proper care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand the program expects parents to participate in two home visits and two parent/teacher conferences per year.</td>
<td>We will remind you of the dates scheduled for the home visits and parent/teacher conferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand the program encourages parent participation in the Parent Committee/Policy Council.</td>
<td>We will provide information regarding Parent Committee and Policy Council meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the program is not meeting my needs, I understand that I have the opportunity to speak to you, the coordinator or director regarding my concerns.</td>
<td>If the program does not seem to be meeting your needs, we will discuss this with you and make changes as necessary and appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have received a copy of the Parent Handbook and its contents have been explained to me. I agree to abide by the stated policies and procedures.</td>
<td>We will provide you with a copy of the Parent Handbook and review applicable policies and procedures with you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Guidance/Discipline Policy

Our philosophy is that discipline is guidance, not punishment. Children learn to treat themselves and others in the same ways that the important adults in their lives treat them. Therefore, it is important that guidance/discipline is consistent, gentle and firm rather than harsh.

The guiding premise of guidance/discipline is safety: children may not hurt themselves, hurt others, or be destructive to property. Because young children do not have the same level of understanding or self-control as adults, they will often need adult support with this. Teachers will model safe and appropriate behavior and will explain the reasons for it to children in simple terms (for example, feet on the floor to stay safe, gentle touches so we don’t hurt our friends, we take care of our toys so that we can have fun playing with them, etc.). Teachers will also help children to recognize and name their own feelings and will assist them in learning to express themselves and solve problems verbally rather than physically.

Through teachers’ consistent use of developmentally appropriate expectations, modeling, redirection and positive reinforcement, children will begin to learn to regulate their own emotions and eventually their behavior.

The teachers/staff persons in charge of the child or group of children are responsible for their guidance/discipline. The program’s actual methods of discipline are restricted as follows:

- No corporal punishment will be used, including hitting, spanking, swatting, beating, shaking, pinching, and any other measures intended to induce physical pain or fear.
- Physical restraints will not be used to confine a child.
- Staff will not withhold or threaten to withhold food, rest or use of the bathroom.
- Children will not be subjected to abusive or profane language.
- Children will not be subjected to any form of public or private humiliation, including threats of physical punishment.
- Children will not be subjected to any form of emotional abuse, including shaming, rejecting, terrorizing, threatening or isolating a child.
- Children will not be disciplined for toilet accidents.
- If a child’s behavior is posing a risk to self or others, the child may be temporarily removed to another activity that will help the child regain self-control. Children will not be isolated. They may participate in activities such as deep breathing, reading a social story about emotions or classroom rules, discussing the rules and the rationale for using them, or other sensory strategies. Removal from the group will not exceed one minute per year of age, and will not be used for children younger than 24 months.

Administrative staff and the program's mental health consultant or specialist are available to support teachers and parents with additional guidance/discipline strategies. If there are multiple incidents of concerning behavior or if behaviors pose immediate risk to the child or others, all will work together to start the Behavior Review Process. As part of the Behavior Review Process, the team will develop a behavior management plan. This plan will include training for all staff working with the child. After the conclusion of the Behavior Review Process and after an agreed upon amount of time implementing the plan, the mental health consultant or specialist may make the
recommendation to return a child to the waiting list if the program cannot safely support the child in the classroom environment.

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.

**Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)**

Breakfast, lunch and/or afternoon snack are provided for children enrolled in center-based HS/EHS programs based on the hours that they attend. Meal times and the number of meals served vary based on the hours a child is in the program. Meals and snacks are planned in consultation with a registered dietitian and meet all federal nutrition standards as outlined under the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Parental requests for individual variations in the menu for medical, religious, or personal reasons are honored when requested in writing by the family’s health care provider. Additional documentation may be required.

Because Easter Seals and their Head Start and EHS partners participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) which is a sub-part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), in accordance with their policy, Easter Seals Head Start/EHS does not discriminate on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal and, where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or if all or part of an individual’s income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information. Easter Seals HS also prohibits discrimination on the basis of breastfeeding.
**Pedestrian Safety**

Pedestrian safety education must be provided to children and parents within the first 30 days of the program year. [1310.21(a)]

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 (45 CFR 1310.21(c)). 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](http://www.safekids.org)
Interim Parent and Community Complaint Procedure

Easterseals Head Start and Early Head Start is committed to working with parents, family, and the community to create a positive learning environment for children and families. Easterseals is working with the parent policy groups to develop a formal procedure for addressing parent and community complaints. The revised procedures will be provided to all families and to the community.

In the interim, the following process will be utilized in order to resolve issues and situations at the earliest possible time and at the center or site level.

If you are dissatisfied with any part of the program, please have a conversation with the teacher or home visitor or other staff with whom you have an issue. Hopefully, the issue can be resolved by having an open, courteous, and respectful conversation. If this conversation does not bring a resolution, please discuss the situation with the supervisor/director of the center. A written complaint to Easterseals Head Start/Early Head Start Director can be submitted at any time if resolution is not achieved by speaking with the previous staff members. The written complaint should be factual, focus on what happened, and state a suggested remedy. A written decision by the Vice President of Human Resources will be mailed to the parent within 10 working days of the receipt of a formal complaint.

(Form attached)