



Educating Children, Empowering
Families, Changing Communities

Parent Handbook



A National Head Start Association
Mid Florida Community Services, Inc.
Head Start/Early Head Start



Dear Parents and Guardians:

Welcome and thank you for choosing Mid Florida Community Services, Inc. (MFCS) Head Start/Early Head Start. We are pleased and excited to welcome your family to our program!

This Parent Handbook has been created to provide you with important information and is a tool to help guide you through a successful school year. If you need additional information, please contact the Head Start administrative office in Hernando or Sumter counties at (352)754-2464 or in Volusia County at (386)736-1325 or feel free to use our toll free number 1-888-227-0010 and someone will gladly assist you.

Head Start/Early Head Start is a comprehensive child development program designed to help children develop school readiness and social competency. Our staff recognizes that you are your child's first and most important teacher. As your partner, we will work with you to help your child develop socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically. You are encouraged, at all times, to participate as an essential member of the Head Start team. You may do this by volunteering in your child's classroom, attending and participating in parent meetings, and welcoming staff into your home for visits. Additionally, we urge you to take a leadership role in the program by participating as a member of your center's Parent Committee, obtaining a position on the Policy Council and/or serving on our Health Services Advisory Committee or School Readiness Committee.

We look forward to working with you and your child this year. Again, welcome to Mid Florida Community Services Head Start/Early Head Start!

Sincerely,

Tanya Hall

Tanya Hall
Director of Early Learning Programs

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The information contained in this book is important to its owner. If found, please return to the person(s) listed below.

Owner: _____

You may return it to any Head Start/Early Head Start location in Hernando, Sumter or Volusia counties or please call 1-888-227-0010:

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

MISSION STATEMENT

To provide comprehensive early childhood services that enhance the lives of children and families to collaboratively foster school readiness and self-sufficiency.



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HISTORY OF HEAD START

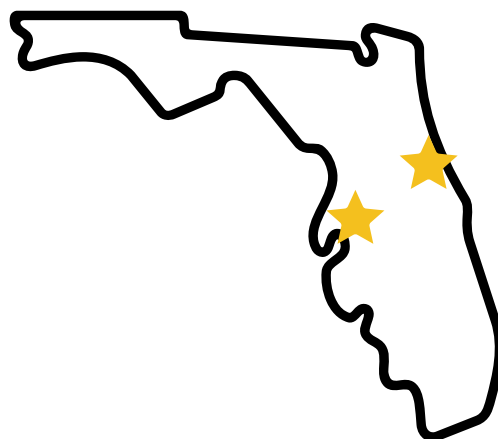
Head Start launched in 1965 as an eight-week summer program by the Office of Economic Opportunity. Over the years, Head Start became a ten to twelve-month program and was enthusiastically received by educators, child development specialists, community leaders and parents across the nation. The Early Head Start program was designed in 1994, by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, to serve children under the age of 3 over a twelve-month period. Head Start serves over one million children and their families each year. Through both programs, Head Start has served more than 32 million children, birth to age 5 and their families.

PHILOSOPHY

Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) understands that children develop at their own pace and learn through hands-on active play. Our staff provides a safe and caring environment so children can develop to their full potential based on classroom experiences that promote a positive self-concept. HS/EHS accepts and embraces each child's individuality, developmental level and family background. Therefore, we provide an inclusive environment in all of our classrooms, where typically developing children and those with special needs are provided a positive learning environment. HS/EHS recognizes the important role parents play as their child's first teacher and encourages families to participate at all levels of the learning experience with their child in our program. From the beginning, Head Start has offered comprehensive services to children and families. These include educational, health, and social service support all of which ensure children are ready to learn. From the moment families first come to Head Start, we work with them to set family goals and address their most pressing needs. We help them identify their strengths, and most of all, help them find their own voices.

SERVICE AREA

Mid Florida Community Services, Inc. (MFCS) is the community action agency granted the opportunity by the federal government to operate the Head Start program in Hernando, Sumter and Volusia counties, serving 977 preschool children and the Early Head Start programs in Hernando and Volusia counties, serving 304 pregnant women, infants and toddlers. The home office is located in Brooksville, Florida in Hernando County.



HOURS OF INSTRUCTION

All centers are open Monday - Friday

Hernando, Sumter and Volusia

- Head Start 8:00AM - 2:00PM
- Early Head Start 8:00AM - 3:00PM



We allow a window from 7:50AM and 8:10AM for drop off in order for class instruction to begin at 8:15AM. In cases where circumstances keep you from arriving on time, please reach out to your child's teacher so they can include your child on the meal count for the day.

Early Head Start and Head Start have scheduled **Early Release Days** throughout the year.

Please refer to the Program calendar for the specific days.

EXTENDED HOURS OF SERVICE

Extended hours are available at specific centers. This is NOT a HS/EHS service, so additional paperwork must be completed to enroll in the extended day program. A separate handbook is available with program guidelines for the Extended Day Program. Please ask your Family Advocate if these services are available at your site for a fee. Working Parents receive priority for extended hour services and based on availability at individual sites.



EMERGENCIES AND WEATHER-RELATED CENTER CLOSINGS

MFCS has established guidelines for school closures, which are often different from our local school districts. If all county government offices in your community close due to bad weather, our centers will also close.

Please pay close attention to the radio or television for government office closings in your county. There may be times when an individual center is forced to close and/or evacuate due to bad weather, facility issues, shortage of staff, etc. In this event, every effort will be made to contact each family directly using the most recent contact information we have on record. This is usually done through email/text message notifications. Our best method for mass communication is through our Facebook page and website.

LOCKDOWN POLICY

In the highly unlikely event that an active threat of violence is suspected to exist within or near our center, posing a threat to staff and children, our building will be placed in a “lockdown” mode. The staff will lock the doors and place children in the safest place possible in their classrooms or the nearest safe room that can be locked. Please be advised that for the safety of children during a lockdown, no one will be permitted to enter or exit the building. The building will only be reopened upon direction from appropriate authorities. Once the situation is clear, we will send out an email/text message to parents. It is important to keep the most current information on file so you can be notified.



CrisisGo is the most complete mobile crisis response software available. CrisisGo is now working with school districts across the nation and in Canada to transform their existing emergency response plans into actionable checklists for their staff. CrisisGo is an easy-to-use integrated safety platform that connects your schools and public safety personnel to rapidly respond to a critical event. Unified and simple safety and security solution that gives all your people — including staff, administrators, students, parents and first responder— instant notifications and management of critical events; the ability to locate and account for people; and safety and prevention tools—including threat assessment and drill management to mitigate incidents before they happen.

DROP-OFF AND PICK-UP PROCEDURES

- Children are to be brought to and picked up from the classroom and must be checked in and out, using Child plus.
- A health check will be conducted upon arrival and dismissal and will be recorded in Child Plus.
- Individual(s) picking children up from school are required to have picture identification for verification purposes.
- Any individual picking up a child must be at least 14 years of age.
- Children will only be released to those listed on the emergency pick-up list. It is HIGHLY RECOMMENDED that at least one other person allowed to pick up your child is listed in the event of an emergency.
- Parents must provide, in writing, any changes to the emergency contacts listed on the emergency pick-up list. Under no circumstances will we accept a phone call to authorize a change in pick-up if that person is not already listed on the pick-up list.



CHILD CUSTODY

It is our intent to meet the needs of children, especially when the parents may be experiencing life-changing situations such as a divorce, separation, or remarriage. Sharing information about such situations may be helpful to the staff in working with your family and will remain strictly confidential.

Staff cannot legally restrict the non-custodial parent from visiting the child, reviewing the child's records, or picking the child up unless furnished with legally filed, executed and current legible documents. Copies of all court documents must be submitted to the center. Parents are responsible for keeping current/updated information available to Head Start staff. If conflicting court orders are presented, our staff will follow the most recently dated order. In case of extreme conflicts, the proper authorities will be contacted. If a parent is listed on a child's birth certificate, that parent is allowed access to pick up the child and view records even if they are not listed on enrollment forms or emergency contact. The only exception to this rule is in providing court documents that state otherwise.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Your child's attendance and timely arrival at school plays a vital role in his/her school readiness success. It is important your child attends school regularly, arrives on time, and, in Head Start, stays until the end of the school day. A consistent morning routine is the best way to ensure a timely arrival. Children are expected to be in class 90% of the time. When your child's attendance falls below 85% your child's enrollment is at risk.

Daily attendance is required for the full day program. We want your child to benefit from the full learning experience.

A phone call to the classroom is required by 8:00 AM to report an absence or tardiness. Family Advocates are required by Head Start standards to contact parents who have not called in by 8:00. When no contact is made, a Home Visit will be conducted.

Irregular Attendance will require contact by the Family Advocate to determine if assistance is needed. Action plans will be developed to ensure your child is attending school consistently. As mentioned above, Home Visits will be conducted when phone or email attempts of contact are not successful. Excessive absences from school, not including emergencies or illnesses, that cannot be resolved, may put your child's enrollment at risk. Daily attendance ensures your child is receiving the most benefits available from the Head Start Program.

Children are expected to be picked up on time daily. Center staff have training and meetings scheduled following dismissal that require their attendance.



CHILD AND PERSONAL SAFETY

MFCS Head Start/Early Head Start requests the cooperation of staff, parents, and the community to safely operate and maintain security at all centers. All visitors are required to follow these safety guidelines:

- Please sign in when volunteering at the centers. You will be provided with a visitor sticker.
- Only children enrolled in our program, and under direct supervision of a staff member, are allowed access to the playground area.
- Please reduce speed in the parking lots and only park in designated parking areas. Never leave a child unattended in a car or leave your car running in any parking lot.
- Please hold your child's hand while in center parking lots and use the designated walkways.

DRUG AND WEAPON FREE CENTERS

MFCS, with cooperation from local police and sheriff departments, strives to keep our centers drug and weapon free. Federal and state statutes prohibit the possession, distribution, or manufacturing of drugs within 1,000 feet of our centers and prohibit possessing or discharging weapons or firearms at a school-sponsored event or on school property.

SMOKE-FREE ENVIRONMENT

The health and well-being of your child is very important to us, which is why all our centers are smoke-free. Smoking and vaping are prohibited in ALL indoor and outdoor spaces utilized by the program. Please refrain from smoking and vaping within sight of children and all parking lots. This policy will be strictly enforced.

SAFETY/SECURITY

Please be advised that all centers are equipped with video cameras with 24-hour surveillance. The video recordings are the property of MFCS. The classrooms and general walkways areas are viewed as a public safe space for all children and staff. Cameras are equipped to capture video and sound for safety and monitoring. For this reason, personal conversations should take place in the office of the Site Supervisor or Family Advocate. Some of our centers are equipped with keyless entry systems at the doors. Please use your assigned code to enter and only distribute it to those you are authorized to pick up your child. For added security, we also ask that you do not hold the door open for anyone you do not recognize.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Within Head Start, confidential information will only be shared with employees who have a “need to know” in order to most appropriately and safely care for your child.

MFCS strives to protect everyone’s right of privacy so confidential and sensitive information about staff, other parents, or children will not be shared with parents.

Please be aware that parents do not have the right to know anything about other children, other parents or personal information about staff.

Parents are asked to limit any photography at the centers to only include their own child. Due to confidentiality concerns, any social media photos must be done through MFCS after confirming a media release has been signed. Parents are asked to refrain from posting any information about other children and families in the program on the internet without prior written authorization. For further clarification please see your Family Advocate.

FEES AND FUNDRAISING

There are no fees for children to attend Head Start/Early Head Start. All events and activities are provided free of charge to the children and families in the program.

Program policy states no staff member, volunteer or parent, can request money or donations from other staff members, volunteers, or parents. Note the following steps if you are interested in asking for any type of donation for the program from the community:

- Share the idea with a staff member
- Staff member will request approval from the Director
- Staff member will notify you if your request is approved and provide you with further guidance

All donations must be reported to our staff so a formal acknowledgement may be made.

CHILD CLOTHING AND PERSONAL BELONGINGS

When choosing clothes for your child to wear to the program, please consider the following:

- Clothing should allow for freedom of movement and be free of hard-to-open snaps, belt buckles, or several small buttons.
- Clothing should be easy to wash due to creative learning activities using supplies such as water, sand, paint, glue, shaving cream, etc. Your child should dress for a mess. When you and your child embrace messy play, then you are embracing the richest learning opportunities.
- Clothing should be “weather appropriate”. If your child has a clothing need, please see your Family Advocate.
- Shoes should be closed toe and rubber soled to avoid injuries. Sneakers are highly recommended. Sandals, Crocs, boots, and high heeled shoes may limit your child’s play experiences.
- Jewelry and beads should be worn at a minimum. MFCS cannot be held responsible for items that may end up broken or lost.
- Due to safety risks, clothing should be free of drawstrings.

Children enrolled in Early Head Start should also adhere to these additional requirements:

- For non-mobile infants, socks/booties or other shoe coverings are appropriate. Shoes are not required.
- For mobile/walking toddlers, shoes are required.
- Infants and toddlers are active! Please ensure your child has at least 2 FULL changes of clothing.

All personal items and clothing such as sweaters, jackets, backpacks, etc. should be marked with your child’s name. Staff members are not responsible for any items that are lost, soiled or broken.

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT IN THE CLASSROOM

Head Start/Early Head Start has provided training for our staff to help them foster positive behavior in children. In our program we use positive guidance techniques:

- **Positive Environment:** Our teachers provide the children with choices of activities and act as role models. They set reasonable and fair limits and reinforce positive behavior.
- **Natural and Logical Consequences:** Children are not punished. Rather, there are consequences that naturally or logically follow. For example, if a child is throwing blocks, he is showing that he is not able to play with them appropriately. The teacher will remind him that blocks are for building. If the action continues, the child will be redirected from the blocks area for a period of time.
- **Redirection:** Staff will help/allow children to choose a different activity and redirect their behavior.
- **Separation:** If a child is very upset over a situation, he/she may need time and help in calming himself/herself. The teacher can sit with a child, often with a book or quiet activity. "Time-out" is not used.
- **Safety Intervention:** Staff will help children to remain safe by taking action when the child's behavior is a danger to themselves or others.

We encourage parents to provide these same behavior support techniques at home. By working together to provide consistency, your child has the increased potential for school readiness success.

DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

The Department of Children and Families requires that parents are notified of the disciplinary practices used by any childcare facility. The practices are listed below for your reference.

Staff, Consultants, Contractors or Volunteers are not allowed to:

- Use corporal punishment;
- Use isolation to discipline a child;
- Bind or tie a child to restrict movement or tape a child's mouth;
- Use or withhold food as a punishment or reward;
- Use toilet learning/training methods that punish, demean, or humiliate a child;
- Use any form of emotional abuse, including public or private humiliation, rejecting, terrorizing, extended ignoring, isolating or corrupting a child;
- Abuse or maltreat a child;
- Use any form of verbal abuse, including profane, sarcastic language, threats, or derogatory remarks in front of a child, or about the child or child's family;
- Withhold active play, physical activity or outdoor time as a punishment or reward;
- Place a child in a crib/portable crib for a time out for disciplinary reasons

HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START PROGRAM EXPULSION POLICY

Mid Florida Community Services will not expel or un-enroll a child because of a child's behavior, consistent with section 1302.17(b) of the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Individual plans will be put in place using the proper channels to support the health and safety of all children in the classroom. Parents are not permitted to know information regarding another child's behavior plan.

PARENT CODE OF CONDUCT

MFCS requires parents of enrolled children to behave in a manner consistent with decency, courtesy, and respect. One of the goals of our program is to provide the most appropriate environment in which a child can grow, learn, and develop. Achieving this ideal environment is not only the responsibility of the employees but is the responsibility of each and every parent or adult who enters a center. Parents who violate the Parent Code of Conduct will not be permitted on the agency property, which will ultimately require their child be dropped off by another adult.

- **Swearing/Cursing:** No parent or adult is permitted to curse or use other inappropriate language on agency property at any time, whether in the presence of a child or not. At no time shall inappropriate language be directed toward staff or children. This behavior is not tolerated and will result in any given person prohibited from being on property.
- **Threatening of Employees, Children, Other Parents or Adults Associated with Head Start/Early Head Start:** Threats of any kind will not be tolerated. All threats shall be reported to appropriate authorities. Parents must be responsible for and in control of their behavior at all times.
- **Physical/Verbal Punishment of your Child or Other Children:** When providing behavioral guidance to their child(ren) at a function or on agency property, parents will use positive methods. The use of corporal punishment (i.e., physically striking a child or inflicting physical punishment) or verbal humiliation is prohibited. Parents are not permitted to directly address another child's behavior.
- **Confrontational Interactions with Employees, Other Parents, or Associates of Head Start/Early Head Start:** While it is understood that parents will not always agree with our employees or the parents of other children, it is expected that all disagreements be handled in a calm and respectful manner and never in the presence of children.
- **Under the Influence of Drugs or Alcohol:** Should staff suspect a parent/guardian is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, staff will take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of the child(ren) involved.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Our program recognizes and supports the Office of Head Start's (OHS) emphasis of school readiness for all children. School readiness for us means children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children.

Head Start/Early Head Start believes children learn in an active learning environment where intentional experiences are provided. Our program follows the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) as the developmental building blocks that are most important for a child's school and long-term success.

These building blocks are play experiences that focus on five essential domains of child development and learning including, (1) language and literacy development, (2) cognition and general knowledge, (3) approaches to learning, (4) perceptual, motor and physical development, and (5) social and emotional development.

CURRICULUM

Our program uses several curricula to guide your child's education.

The Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers and Two's supports caregivers and teachers in creating responsive daily routines and meaningful experiences for young learners. A rich collection of resources is provided to help teachers put knowledge into practice and help them foster children's learning and growth.

The Creative Curriculum for Preschool is a comprehensive, research-based curriculum that features exploration and discovery as a way of learning. The curriculum includes The Foundation—six knowledge-building volumes that help teachers set up a high-quality learning environment and build a thorough understanding of best practices—and Daily Resources, which offer step-by-step guidance in the form of Teaching Guides and additional daily teaching tools that help teachers plan for children's development and learning each day. The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool is fully aligned with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework and state early learning standards.

Teaching Strategies Gold is an authentic on-going assessment system. GOLD® automatically links teaching and assessment, making it easier to connect the dots across the most important aspects of high-quality early childhood education. It creates a profile on each child so each teacher can best support children's school readiness success.

The Pyramid Model teaches social and emotional learning framework that promotes young children's healthy development and prevents challenging behaviors. Teachers model and practice classroom rules, proper interaction with others, and conflict resolution. Since family involvement is essential to children's emotional learning, a family component is also used.



THE ROLE OF THE SITE SUPERVISOR

The Site Supervisor provides oversight for each center for which they are responsible. They are the immediate supervisors of all teaching staff and assist other staff members assigned to their sites. The Site Supervisor ensures the education of your child meets all Head Start standards and the site follows all local, state and federal guidelines. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's education or center staff, the Site Supervisor is the first person to talk to. You should have the name of that person and their contact number written in the front of this handbook.

DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING PROCESS

Your child's developmental and school readiness skills are screened within the first forty-five (45) days of entry into the program. Results of the screening are shared with parents during a parent/teacher conference or home visit. If screening results identify a possible concern or risk factor, staff may request consent from the parent for classroom intervention and/or further evaluation. This helps us recognize a need for early intervention if such a need exists. Although we make every effort to make the process as child friendly as possible, children tend to perform better after they have become familiar with their teacher, new friends and the classroom.

DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

An ongoing assessment is conducted on your child throughout the year. This information gives teachers the ability to determine your child's skill level and provides strategies to assist your child in the learning process. This information is shared with parents during home visits and parent conferences. Parents receive login and password information to access and use the assessment tool. Throughout the year, parents are encouraged to access results of their child's developmental progress and home learning activities. Please feel free to discuss your child's progress at any time with your child's teacher.

INCLUSION SERVICES

All our classrooms are filled with children who have a wide range of abilities, and our teachers create an environment in which all children – those with or without disabilities – thrive. Our learning environments are designed to build upon children’s strengths and needs, and help all of them, special needs or not, develop school readiness skills. By providing this quality learning environment, children with and without disabilities develop a greater appreciation of each other and of individual differences.

HOME VISITS AND PARENT CONFERENCES

Home visits are conducted at least twice a year. The first home visit allows the teacher to become familiar with your child in his/her home environment. During both home visits, teachers will discuss your child’s needs, strengths and goals. Any other concerns you may have at the time of the visit can also be discussed. Parent conferences are scheduled twice each year. This is an opportunity for you to review your child’s progress and set goals for Kindergarten Readiness. Teachers work together with parents to identify convenient times for parent conferences to take place. Family Advocates may also make home visits on an “as needed” basis.

TRANSITIONAL SERVICES

A transition means that something is changing in the life of a child. Children experience many transitions, including from home to an early care and education setting, between age groups or program settings, and from preschool to kindergarten. Our program staff supports all families and their children in planning the transition to the next program or setting. A smooth transition will benefit both you and your child. For children transitioning from Early Head Start to Head Start, this transition shall begin six months before your child’s 3rd birthday with a new application for Head Start. Please be aware, a family must qualify for Head Start age and income eligibility. Children attending EHS WILL NOT automatically qualify. Head Start children transitioning to kindergarten will experience “Kindergarten” like planning and activities, typically when returning from winter break.



MEDICAL HEALTH SERVICES

Physical and Immunizations

All children without an exemption issued by the Department of Health must have a current immunization record (Form DH680) on file. All children are required to have an up to date well baby check/physical exam (Form DH3040) on file. Per DCF, if the custodial parents or legal guardians fail to provide the documentation required above within 30-days of enrollment, the facility shall not allow the child to remain in the program. Additionally, if either document expires, the child will not be allowed in care until updated records are on file. As a courtesy, your Family Advocate may send a notice reminding you of any upcoming expiration dates. However, it is your responsibility to maintain all required documents whether you have been provided advanced notification or not.

Health Screenings

In many instances your child has received some screenings as part of their well-baby check/physical exam. Head Start ensures all children entering the program receive health services according to Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) guidelines and Head Start requirements. All children in Head Start are required to have the following screenings:

- Blood Pressure
- Hearing & Vision
- Height & Weight
- Lead & Hemoglobin
- Social & Emotional



Medication

Any child with a medical condition requiring medication in the classroom or special instruction for the child to participate in Head Start/Early Head Start must have an Individual Medical Care Plan (IMCP). The IMCP needs to be completed by their medical provider prior to entering the classroom. If the IMCP requires medication, the child cannot be in class until the medication is in the classroom and the Authorization for Medication Administration form has been completed.

Medication Administration

For a child to receive any type of medication (prescription or over-the-counter) during the day, the following requirements must be met:

- An IMCP completed by the child's pediatrician indicating the medication is required to be given in the classroom. HS/EHS staff will not give the first dose of a new medication to a child.
- Medication must be in its original container and not expired.
- Authorization for Medication Administration form must be completed.

Illness

If a child becomes ill while in school, the parent/guardian will be contacted to pick up their child. Until the parent/guardian arrives, the child will be isolated from other children as much as possible and allowed to rest in a quiet area under the care of a staff member. MFCS follow the Department of Children and Family (DCF) Signs and symptoms of an illness that include the following:

- Severe Coughing, causing a child to become red or blue in the face or to make a whooping sound
- Difficult or rapid breathing
- Stiff neck
- Diarrhea (more than 1 loose stool within 24 hours)
- Temperature of 100.4°F or higher in conjunction with any other signs of illness (Any infant younger than 2 months of age with fever should get immediate medical attention)
- Pink eye or red eye with discharge
- Exposed, open skin lesions
- Unusually dark urine and/or gray or white stool
- Yellowish skin or eyes
- Any other unusual sign or symptoms of illness

Your child's teacher will complete our Temporary Exclusion of a Sick Child form. The teacher will indicate on the form whether your child may return when signs and symptoms are no longer present or if your child will require a note from the doctor stating they may return to the classroom.

If a parent/guardian is not available to pick up their ill child, others on the emergency pick up list will be contacted. Should an ill child not be picked up, staff will make the best decision for the child to include calling 9-1-1 or contacting the Department of Children and Families.

Returning to the Classroom

Once a child has been sent home for an illness, the child may not return without a doctor's note or until the signs and symptoms are no longer present. This will be noted on the Temporary Exclusion of a Sick Child form. If a child has been hospitalized or received treatment in an Emergency Room, the parent must have a doctor's note stating the child is able to return to the classroom with or without restrictions.

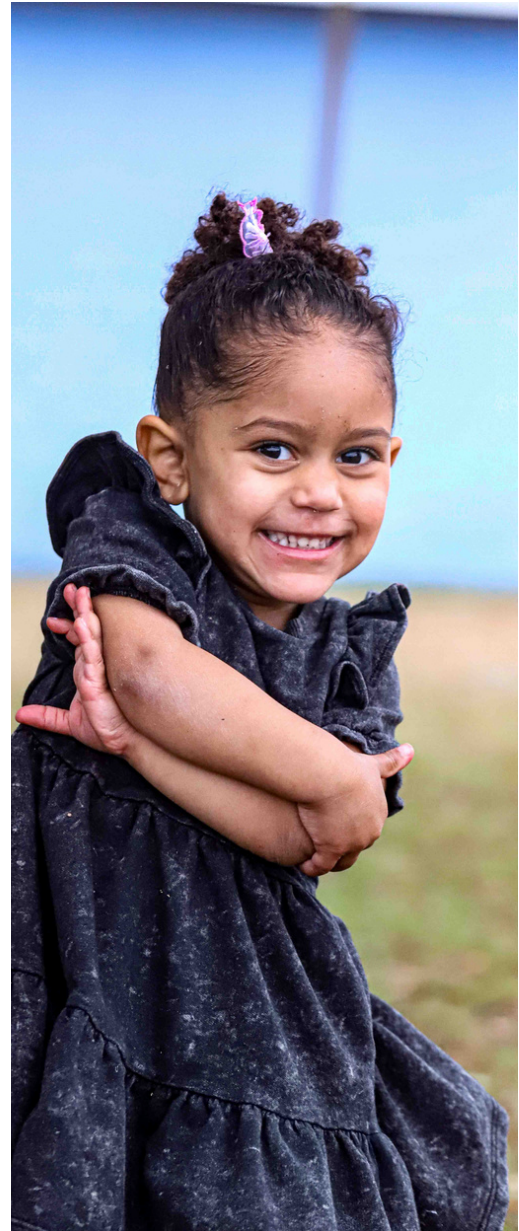
Lice

Per DCF policy, children will also be excluded at the end of a day if they are found to have head lice. Proof of treatment will be required for re-entry into the classroom.

Accidents/Incidents/Injuries during the Head Start/Early Head Start Day

Your child's safety and well-being are always our first priority. If your child has an accident/incident during school, the staff will follow agency policies and procedures and you will be notified as soon as possible.

For serious illness and/or injury, when immediate medical treatment is required, staff will contact 911 and parents will be contacted immediately following. An Incident/Injury form will be completed by a staff member and must be signed by the person picking up the child.



ORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Good oral health is important to a child's overall growth and development, including the development of speech, language, and behavior. We ensure the following:

Oral Hygiene

- Children over two years of age are provided with their own toothbrushes and toothpaste for classroom use.
- Children under two will be assisted in age-appropriate tooth brushing. under two will be assisted in age-appropriate tooth brushing.
- Children brush their teeth after eating as part of the daily routine.
- Parents are encouraged to help children continue good dental habits at home.

Dental Exams and Treatment

A dental exam is required for every child within 90 days (about 3 months) of entry to the program.

The Family Advocate and/or Medical/Oral Health Services Coordinator may also provide assistance in making appointments, transportation and translation services, if needed.

NUTRITION SERVICES

For our Head Start children, breakfast and lunch are provided for each child. Our program is reimbursed by the USDA for the meals served, for this reason, no food served at mealtime is allowed to leave our center.



For our Early Head Start infants and toddlers, meals are provided based upon the developmental level of the children. For example, infants who are on formula or breastmilk, are fed on demand. The formula served will be the same as the infant is fed at home and will be provided by our program. For infants who are breastfed, we will have designated breastfeeding areas and also have storage space for expressed milk. Baby food will also be provided by our program. For toddlers who eat solid foods, our menus will be adapted for the ages of the children served. Menus are developed and approved by a Registered Dietitian using the USDA MyPlate guidelines. They are provided monthly and are posted at centers. For more information on MyPlate visit www.choosemyplate.gov.

Food Allergies and Substitutions

Menu substitutions are made to meet a child's dietary needs. If your child has food allergies or intolerances, a Medical Statement for Meal Modifications form needs to be completed by their doctor before entering the classroom. Menu substitutions can also be made based on religious or personal beliefs. Under certain special circumstances a parent/caretaker may be allowed to provide their child's meals with approval from the Nutrition Services Coordinator or Health Services Manager.

Outside Foods

Due to potential allergic reactions, outside foods/beverages are NOT permitted to be brought to the classrooms/sites for child consumption without prior approval. USDA and Head Start food preparation guidelines require foods to be purchased from a licensed food vendor or approved caterer. When necessary, this will be done by staff members.

Family Style Meals

Head Start classrooms implement family style dining. During family style dining, the food is placed in serving bowls on the table. Teachers sit with the children and food is passed from child to child with help. Family-style dining helps create an enjoyable mealtime, while still being a part of the instructional day. Parents are encouraged to continue family style dining at home with their child.

In our Early Head Start classrooms, infants are always held when being fed a bottle. Baby food will be fed to the babies while being held or while the infant is seated in a chair with a tray. For children eating table food, food will be put on plates before being served to the toddlers and all EHS children should be fed on demand.

I Am Moving, I Am Learning (IMIL)

Our Head Start classrooms implement the "I am Moving, I am Learning" (IMIL) initiative. The main goal of the initiative is to create awareness regarding childhood obesity and provide strategies and activities to be implemented in all levels of the program. IMIL seeks to increase daily moderate to vigorous physical activity, improve the quality of movement activities intentionally planned and facilitated by adults, and promote healthy food choices every day. IMIL uses the character Choosy to help the children identify with the program. Look and see what his name stands for!



Classroom Nutrition Activities

Children will be involved with hands-on food activities in our Head Start classrooms that provide opportunities to try nutritious and diverse foods. Oftentimes these foods may be from their school gardens. Staff will be responsible for assuring individual children's needs are met and foods served meet all safety and nutritional requirements.

Birthdays/Holidays

A child's birthday is a wonderful time to recognize them as special. The teachers will be creative in acknowledging this special day in the classroom. However, for the health and safety of the children, bringing food of any kind to the classroom/site to celebrate a birthday and/or another holiday is not permitted. It is important when recognizing your child's teacher in celebration of any kind that this rule be applied as well. We appreciate our staff and children but must find alternative ways aside from food, cake and candles to show appreciation.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Parents have access to mental health services for their children through our Behavior Specialists and/or our Mental Health Consultants, who work together with teachers and parents, identifying any problems that may interfere with a child's social or emotional growth. They are also available for parents and families should you need help dealing with any social/emotional issues affecting the home.

Behavior Specialists are available Monday - Friday from 8:00AM - 4:30PM to meet with you. Additional hours are available to meet each family's needs. Our Mental Health Consultants will be available on an appointment basis only. Please contact your Family Advocate for further information.



Child Abuse and Neglect – Mandated Reporting

Head Start/Early Head Start staff are mandated to report any suspicion of child abuse, neglect (including medical and dental), or abandonment to the Florida Department of Children and Families, per Chapter 39 of the Florida State Statutes.

If you have any reason to suspect that your child or another child may have been abused, neglected, or abandoned call the Florida Abuse Hotline at:

1-800-96-ABUSE

1-800-962-2873



**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT
OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

PARENT, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Family Services

We encourage parents to get involved in their child's classroom, center activities, attend field trips, parents' meetings, home activities and to serve on committees. Every parent has something to offer.

Family Engagement provides parents the opportunity to work together and decide what kinds of learning experiences they want their children to have in Head Start. Parents should participate in Head Start for the benefit of the children enrolled in the program. Providing a good Head Start program will take dedicated people working together, sharing their ideas, talents, knowledge and energy so that the children can receive the greatest benefits. The more knowledge and energy parents and staff invest in the program, the better the program will be. Parents are their children's primary teacher and should be engaged in their children's learning.

The Family Services area represents an organized system of:

- Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment and Attendance (ERSEA).
- Services to build upon the individual strengths of families to meet their needs and goals.
- Parent conferences to assist parents with goal setting and assuring continuity of services offered to families.
- Parent Family and Community Engagement experienced through parent activities, parent meetings and festivals.
- Some of the activities Family Advocates use to support families include:
 - Working with community agencies, making referrals as needed
 - Parent meetings/guest speakers
 - Helping to create family partnership agreements
 - Family assessment and goal setting
 - Providing information about available community resources
 - Recruitment and enrollment of children
 - Emergency assistance and or crisis intervention
 - Coordinating parent trainings

Family Partnership Services

Every Head Start/Early Head Start program must implement a family partnership process that includes a family partnership agreement and activities to support family well-being, including family safety, health, and economic stability, to support child learning and development. Each program will offer services and support for children with disabilities. Family Partnerships will be initiated early in the program year and continue for as long as the family participates in the program. Each family's strengths and needs will be identified through the completion of the enrollment process and Outcomes Assessment Form. Goals will be developed between the Family Advocate and the family to be reviewed monthly at scheduled parent conferences and adjusted as necessary.

Individualized Family Partnership Services between Families and Family Advocates

FAMILY GOALS:

- Collaborate to identify interests, needs and aspiration related to the family engagement outcomes
- Work together to achieve identified individualized family engagement outcomes
- Establish and implement a jointly developed Family Goal Plan in which staff and families review individual progress, revise goals, evaluate and track whether identified needs and goals are met and adjust strategies on an on-going basis through monthly parent conferences with the Family Advocate.
- Be provided resources based on the urgency and intensity of identified family needs and goals.



Head Start/Early Head Start's Commitment to Parents

Our program will ensure that each parent will be:

- Treated with dignity and respect.
- Provided the opportunity to form a family partnership agreement, set personal and family goals, and develop plans to achieve those goals.
- Provided both home visits and parent conferences to discuss their child's overall progress towards school readiness.
- Welcomed in the classroom and encouraged to volunteer throughout the program.
- Provided information and referrals through community resources dealing with health, education, and self-sufficiency.
- Provided opportunities to participate in program governance activities such as parent committees, Health Services Advisory Committee, School Readiness Committee and Policy Council.
- Provided the opportunity to attend various training courses during the program year.

Parents' Commitment to Head Start/Early Head Start

- Treat other parents, Head Start/Early Head Start guests, and Head Start/Early Head Start staff with dignity and respect.
- Provide accurate up-to-date contact information during the school year to your Family Advocate as soon as change happens.
- Partner with Head Start/Early Head Start to form a strong team to educate their child and enhance their family's opportunity to grow in parenting, relationship and leadership skills, and self-sufficiency.
- Be available for both conferences and home visits as required/requested by teaching staff and Family Advocate.
- Provide up-to-date physical and immunization records as required by the State of Florida.
- Support the School Readiness goals by following daily attendance requirements and daily start and ending times. (See Section on ATTENDANCE)
- Ensure their child is signed in/out in the classroom by an authorized individual.
- Volunteer and/or participate in their child's classroom or activities, when possible.
- Attend Parent Connect Meetings to assist in the decision-making process and participate in the Parent Curriculum.
- Dress appropriately at all times when on MFCS property or when at other Head Start activities. This includes not wearing pajamas or revealing clothing while on site at any given time. Clothing with profanity, hate speech, or graphics are not welcome on our campuses.
- Ensure our classrooms remain a cell phone free zone by completing any phone calls before entering.



Parent Participation

Monthly Parent Meetings

A Parent Committee is established at each center to provide every parent of an enrolled child the opportunity to assist in the development of activities that address their interests and needs and that support the education and healthy development of their children. All parents of enrolled children are automatically members of the Parent Committee at their child's center. Parents work with staff to plan, coordinate, organize activities, volunteer in the classrooms and other areas of the center, participate in recruiting, and share their areas of expertise with other parents and staff. Each center Parent Committee should meet at least once a month. We urge you to share your talents, knowledge, time, and energy with us by volunteering.



Male Involvement Representatives

Fathers/Significant Males are a very important part to your child's success. Head Start/Early Head Start encourages the participation of fathers/significant males wherever possible.

Some possible Father/Significant Male engagement activities are:

- Assisting in the planning and encouraging the participation in Male Involvement activities at the center
- Encourage fathers/significant males to become more involved in the lives of their children
- Encourage fathers/significant males to participate in Head Start/Early Head Start activities as well as in-center and off-site events.
- Assisting with the development and coordination of a Center Male Advisory Group

Participation on Parent Committees

Parent committees are organized at each center and are made up of the parents of children currently enrolled at the center. These committees meet monthly at a date and time determined by the parents. Parents elect officers who receive training on how to conduct a meeting. Your involvement will allow you to learn about your child's progress, develop social/interpersonal skills, get to know center staff, other parents and share in the decision-making process. You are an important part of the team.

Each parent committee is responsible for the following:

- Planning, conducting and participating in activities for parents and children.
- Encouraging parent participation in classroom activities and being an active part of their child's Head Start experience.

Participation on Policy Council

The purpose of Policy Council is to provide a formal way for parents to be involved in the program planning and decision-making process of our program. The Policy Council is made up of parents and community representatives who want to support the Head Start/Early Head Start program, and also have an interest in children, families and the community. The Policy Council members have a vital leadership role as a representative of their Head Start center to receive information, training, and reports, which they take back to share with other parents at their monthly center parent meeting.

Policy Council training is offered to all Council members early in the school year. The training increases members' knowledge of the Head Start/Early Head Start program, enhances the parent/child relationship, and helps the parent in developing leadership skills. The Policy Council meets at least 10 times per year using a virtual platform. The time and virtual invite along with a packet of information, is provided to members in advance. Should there be a need to meet in person, transportation is provided, if needed, to all Policy Council meetings and mileage expenses are reimbursed to Policy Council members as necessary. We encourage you to be a part of our Policy Council and participate in major decisions affecting the program, your children, and your family.

Classroom Volunteers

To ensure the safety of the children in the program, parents, family, and community members will be asked to complete a short Volunteer Application each program year. Volunteer instructions will be provided to classroom volunteers during the enrollment process and during Volunteer/Chaperone trainings.



Head Start End of the Year Celebrations

We encourage our teaching staff to recognize the achievements of children leaving the Head Start program and entering into public school and they do this in a variety of ways. They may sing songs, do finger plays, dance, and present artwork at an end of the year event and parents are always encouraged to attend these activities. After the classroom celebration, parents and children can have a field day, a water play day or another type of parent/child event. We do not, however, permit formal graduation ceremonies to take place. Spending time practicing for a formal ceremony can cause stress for both the children and teaching staff and limits time spent educating your child. In addition, there are costs involved in purchasing graduation caps and gowns, which we will not impose on parents. We encourage your Parent Committee to plan a fun-filled day with your children. All activities must be child-friendly, child-sensitive, meaningful and developmentally appropriate.

SCHOOL READINESS GOALS

Early Learning experiences are intentionally planned by our staff to support your child's school readiness success. The children enrolled in the MFCS Head Start/Early Head Start program will:

Language and Literacy

- Increase their English Language communication skills while supporting the child's home language.

Social-Emotional Development

- Express and manage their feelings appropriately.
- Develop and maintain trusting relationships.

Cognition and General Development

- Develop and demonstrate an increased knowledge of early learning skills.
- Develop life skills and independence through everyday routines and interactions.

Approaches to Learning

- Show curiosity, creativity and an eagerness to learn and experience new things.

Physical Development and Health

- Demonstrate control of their large and small muscles.
- Develop and practice healthy and safe habits.



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Head Start”**

PARENT AND CENTER ACTIVITIES ARE POSTED ON
THE WEBSITE!

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