

# Head Start Program Parent & Family Handbook



***School Year 2025-2026***

**HEAD START  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
OFFICES**

**COMMUNITY ACTION,  
INC. OF CENTRAL TEXAS**

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## **WELCOME TO HEAD START!**

Congratulations on your child's selection into the Head Start Program. Your family meets all the Head Start eligibility requirements. Parents are their child's first and best teachers and play a very important role in our program. Children feel valued when their caregivers participate in their education. The Early Head Start and Head Start Program staff is eager to become educational partners with our parents. We continuously work to provide parents with different opportunities to help them be involved in their child's education.







Head Start believes that parents are a vital part of their children's development, and we are here to help you and your child be successful in school and at home. These goals are attained by the following family, parent, and community engagement practices that include:

1. Age-appropriate education that prepares children for success in school and life experiences.
2. Comprehensive case management and family support services.
3. Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children.
4. Training for parents on how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children.
5. Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency.
6. Volunteer opportunities including Parent Committee and Policy Council.

### **Head Start Loves Volunteers**



The Head Start Program welcomes you to our centers and encourages you to take an active role in your child's Head Start experience. Becoming an active participant in your child's education helps enhance your child's learning and social experience. Here are just a few ways of getting involved at your center and at home:

-  Participate in parent/child activities and center events.
-  Visit with the teacher and help teacher prepare materials for the classroom.
-  Visit with your Family Advocate and your child's teacher.
-  Attend parent meetings and agency wide activities
-  Participate in program governance by signing up as a Policy Council Representative.
-  Complete kind activities sent by the Site Supervisor via Learning Genie.

We offer opportunities for you to volunteer from home by completing take-home projects. This

works well for parents who work full-time but still want to help in their child's classroom. Please visit your Site Supervisor to learn how to get started!

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# What to expect at your center...

## Site Operations

### Hours, Days, and Months of Operation

Head Start operates on an August through May school calendar. Early Head Start operates from August through July. Sites are open Monday through Friday, except for local school closings, posted holidays, and staff development days. Site hours are from 7:30 am – 2:30 pm, except at sites where services are offered in collaboration with school districts.

### Arrival Times

Parents are required to sign in their child on a daily basis. Parents are expected to bring their children to the center between 7:30 am – 8:00 am. Consistent routines are crucial for children, particularly during their transition into care. Inconsistent routines can make adjustment to group care difficult for children. Children need to arrive on time for the following reasons:

1. Teachers plan the children's morning curriculum around this schedule. The drop-off routine is an important part of our individualized curriculum, but we also want to ensure that the child benefits from the full schedule of daily activities, including time to form friendships and learn social and play skills.
2. Children who arrive late miss important time to start the morning routine with other children. Transitions are easier when children arrive during the scheduled arrival time. Arrival at any other time is often difficult for the young child.
3. Older children lie down for rest and naps as a group. The child who has slept in and arrives late is "out of sync" with the rest of the group for the remainder of the day, and this adjustment can be hard for the child.



### Pick Up Time

Parents are responsible for picking up their child at the site by closing time (2:30 pm at most sites). Dismissal time begins 15 minutes before the site closing time. If the parent cannot pick up the child by 2:30 pm, then the parent must call the site and give the reason why the parent will be late. If the parent fails to pick up the child within 30 minutes after the site closes, the local authorities Police/Sheriff's Office will be called. If a parent is repeatedly late to pick up their child, the parent will be required to meet with program staff to develop a family support plan to address the situation. If late pick-ups remain an issue after meeting with program staff, the family may be required to discuss the termination of services.

### Procedures to Release Children

Children will be released only to persons who are listed on the Child's Emergency Card or legal parents/guardians. Any person that comes to pick up the child must present a photo

ID (driver's license, state identification, etc.) when asked. Parents must keep this information up to date and may contact the Family advocate or Site Supervisor to make changes to this document at any point during the school year.

If the parent wishes for someone other than the persons listed on the Emergency Card to pick up their child, the parent must call the site and speak to two staff members to let them know who will be picking up the child. Persons picking up children from the site must be at least 16 years of age. Children will only be released to professionals or any other individuals with the proper documented authority to do so.

Children will not be released from the site to any person showing signs or acting as if they may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs (red, glassy eyes, slurring speech, etc.). Staff will contact another person on the Emergency Card to pick up the child. Staff may call local police or the sheriff if needed.

### **Custody/Court Documentation**

If a protective order or child custody/visitation order that specifies a visitation schedule exists, parents must provide a copy to keep in the child's file. Emergency Cards must reflect the current status of all protective orders and safety plans. Any custody changes need to come from the judge/court with applicable documentation.


Community Action, Inc. of Central Texas Head Start Program intends to meet the needs of children, especially when the parents may be experiencing difficult situations such as a divorce, separation, or remarriage. Sharing information about such situations may be helpful to the staff (and your child), and it will remain strictly confidential.


Our program cannot legally restrict the non-custodial parent from visiting the child, reviewing the child's records, or picking the child up unless we have been furnished with legally filed, executed, and current court documents. Copies of all court documents must be submitted to the Site Supervisor. If the Site Supervisor is unavailable, you may submit it to the Family Advocate. In the case of conflicts at the site, the proper authorities will be contacted.


### **Attendance**


For children to receive the best early education experience, it is essential that they arrive on time every day. Children who attend regularly tend to have better outcomes than those who attend only occasionally or sporadically. Head Start strives to align with the school district's expectations, aiming for a 90% attendance rate. This means that a child should miss no more than 2 days per month or 18 days per year.

The program attendance policy includes the following guidelines:

 Attendance is taken daily, and all absences are recorded.


 Communication with staff is vital. If your child will be absent or late, please contact the center within one hour of the program's start time and provide a reason for the absence (e.g., illness, doctor's appointment, transportation issues, etc.).

 If you know your child will be absent for multiple days, please notify your Family Advocate in advance.

 If the parent/guardian fails to notify the center within one hour of the start time and the family cannot be reached after repeated attempts, the Family Advocate will conduct a home visit to determine the reason





for the absence.


 Head Start promotes open communication if you are facing challenges with regularly bringing your child to school. Our program can work with your family to create a support plan or connect you with our community partners for assistance.


### **Attendance Concerns**

If your child misses school often, this may result in the child's slot being considered an enrollment vacancy:

 If your child misses 3 consecutive school days without contacting the center, the Family Advocate will visit your home to check on the well-being of your family.

 If your child misses 5 consecutive school days without contacting the center, the family will be notified of a deadline for your child to return to school.

 If your child misses 10 consecutive school days without contacting the center, your child's slot will be considered abandoned and will be treated as a program vacancy.

 If your child misses 30 consecutive school days, even with communication to the center, your child's slot will be considered and will be treated as a program vacancy.

### **Transitions**

#### **Early Head Start: 30 Month Transitions**

In the Early Head Start Program, children will age out on or after their third birthday. To ensure continuity of care, children who turn 3 during the school year may remain in the center until the end of the current semester if a transition into Head Start is not possible. A 30-month transition plan is completed with the Family Advocate for all children scheduled to exit the program. To ensure the most appropriate placement and services after participation in Early Head Start, a transition meeting is held with the family at least six months before the child's third birthday. Families are encouraged to apply for Head Start, with applications valid for the current school year. Selection for Head Start is not guaranteed, and all children will be placed on a waitlist.

#### **Head Start: Pre-K/Kindergarten Transition**

As children exit the Head Start Program, our staff works with families to create a transition plan that includes strategies to support a successful transition to pre-kindergarten or kindergarten. This meeting, which takes place at the end of the program year with the Family Advocate, provides families with essential information and resources related to their child's education. It involves details about services available for children with disabilities and options for language programs. In addition, the program will assist families in initiating the registration process with their respective school district.

#### **Transitions Within the Program**

All children must reside within the school district of the center they attend. If a family moves, we will attempt to transfer them to another center if a spot is available. If no space is open, the child may remain at their current center for a specified period, as determined by the ERSEA & Transition Coordinator. Afterward, the child will be placed on a waitlist for the appropriate center.

#### **Transportation**

Transportation services are available for students enrolled at Bonham Pre-Kindergarten School by the public-school transportation department.

#### **Pedestrian Safety**

Safety Education information must be provided to all Head Start Program



parents/guardians and children within the first forty-five (45) days of the child's entry into the program.

## Health and Safety

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### Camera Policy

Community Action Inc. of Central Texas utilizes cameras in all classrooms (excluding community sites) to ensure the safety and security of children, staff, visitors, and facilities within our Head Start Child Development Centers. Cameras are used for safety and security purposes to monitor children, staff, visitors, and the facilities. Only authorized staff have access to camera footage. Parents and guardians do not have access to the live camera feed or recorded footage for personal observation of their child. In the event of an emergency or health and safety incident, video footage may be shared with law enforcement, regulatory agencies, or other relevant parties to ensure the safety and well-being of children and staff. Community Action Inc. of Central Texas is committed to complying with all local, state, and federal laws related to the use of cameras, surveillance, and privacy.

### Cell Phone Policy

Community Action Inc. of Central Texas encourages parents to limit cell phone use while on the premises of Head Start Child Development Centers to foster meaningful connections with their children and staff. Please use cell phones only for essential matters, such as brief calls or messages, and kindly step outside the classroom. Parents and guardians should refrain from taking photos or videos to respect the privacy and safety of all children. By minimizing distractions, we aim to create an engaging, focused environment that supports the development of every child.



### Immunization Requirements

- 📋 All children are required to be up-to-date and remain current or have a valid immunization exemption on file.
- 📋 A current immunization record must be on file at the center.

Head Start follows the recommendations issued by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. You may request a copy from the Site Supervisor or Family Advocate.

### Health and Developmental Screenings

Within the first 45 days of enrollment, all children will be screened for vision, hearing, speech, nutrition, height and weight, and physical and emotional development. The results will be shared with parents and, if needed, a follow-up evaluation and a referral for services will be initiated.

In addition to the screenings listed above, the Head Start Program will assist families in completing the following requirements:

Physical exam within 90 days of entry into the Site and annually thereafter. (Lead screening blood test and a hemoglobin/hematocrit are completed at 12 months; and again at 24 months. If not previously done, children age 3 will complete at time of physical.)

- 📋 TB (tuberculosis) risk screening completed annually on children ages 1 and up. If the child is found to be at risk, a TB skin test is required to show the child is free of TB.



Two dental exams each year for children ages 6 months and up.

## Medical Emergencies

In the event of a serious injury or illness at school or during a field trip, 911 will be called immediately, and parents will be notified as soon as possible.

During enrollment, parents are required to provide information about any known allergies, existing illnesses, or medical conditions that may affect their child. If a child has any medical concerns, an Individualized Health Plan (IHP) will be developed in collaboration with the parents and appropriate program staff to ensure the child's needs are met effectively.

## Illness and Exclusion

The Head Start Program follows the *National Resource Center – Caring for Our Children* guidelines to ensure the health and safety of all children in child care settings.

Upon arrival, a morning health check is conducted after the child and parent are greeted.

This quick visual assessment, typically lasting less than a minute, evaluates the child's health since their last attendance. Any concerns identified during the health check will be discussed with the parent and documented in Child Plus by staff. If concerns arise after the parent has left the center, the Site Supervisor will contact the parent, provide information about the concern, and allow the parent to respond. All concerns will be documented by the Site Supervisor in Child Plus.

### Children are NOT permitted at the center with any of the following symptoms or illnesses:

- Fever (oral, armpit, temporal, or ear temperature of 100° or higher)  
*Children must be fever-free for 24 hours without medication before returning to school.*
- Uncontrolled diarrhea
- Vomiting (2 or more episodes within 24 hours)
- Rash with fever
- Lethargy (appearing overly tired or unresponsive)
- Abnormal bleeding
- Mouth sores with drooling
- Behavior changes that prevent participation in normal activities
- Other signs that the child may be severely ill
- A child diagnosed with a communicable disease will not be allowed to return without a doctor's note releasing the child.

A child may also be excluded if they require more care than teachers and staff can provide while ensuring the safety and supervision of other children.

### If a child develops symptoms while at school:

Parents (or emergency contacts listed on the Emergency Card) will be called to pick up the child immediately.

Parents should have an alternate pick-up plan in place for emergencies. Family Advocates can assist families in developing a plan if needed.

## Head Lice

If a child is found to have lice, the parent or guardian will be notified at the end of the day during pick-up. The child must be treated and cared for at home before returning to school. A child will only be excluded immediately if there are open sores on the scalp.

## Medication at School

If your child requires medication during school hours, it will be administered only if the following requirements are met:

- Medication must be in the **original container** with the prescription label.
- Medication will be given **only as directed** on the prescription label.
- The **child's name** on the label must match the name of the child receiving the medication.
- Medication **cannot be expired**.
- Possible side effects should be discussed with the teacher.
- A **Medication Authorization Form** must be completed and signed by the parent/guardian.

- Medication is kept **out of reach of children** at all times.
- Medications should **never be stored** in a child's backpack or diaper bag.
- At School District sites, medication is kept and administered by the **School Nurse**.
- Special containers for medication requiring refrigeration are kept in the refrigerator at each site.
- Non-prescription items, such as lotion, sunscreen, and bug spray, also require **parental permission** before use.

## Emergency Evacuation

In the event of an emergency, the Emergency Evacuation Plan will be followed (Parents receive a copy at Enrollment). This plan provides details to the parent of the location where children will be taken should the site need to be evacuated. The plan will be followed when there is a serious accident, injury, or illness, or during a dangerous event such as fire or flood. Phone contact will be made as soon as possible and will provide instructions on where to pick up your child. Emergency Evacuation Procedures will be posted at each site. The procedures will include the floor plan of the site and the plan.

## Parental Notifications

Changes in policy, parent meetings, school closings, school and community events etc. will be provided to families by Learning Genie, flyers, newsletters, calendars, notes or announcements. Families are also notified by text or email via Child Plus. All notices will be given in the family's native language.

## Meals and Nutrition



Nutritious breakfasts, lunches, and snacks are provided for all children.

- 👤 Our child care centers follow the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and school district collaborations follow the USDA National School Breakfast and National School Lunch child nutrition programs.
- 👤 Infants are fed on demand. They will receive iron fortified formula or you may bring breastmilk and we will hold it at the proper temperature until feeding time.
- 👤 Mothers have the right to breastfeed their baby at the center, if they choose. Parents have the right to provide the center with breastmilk for their baby while in our care. A comfortable sitting area with an adult sized seat will be made available for mom's that choose to breastfeed on site.
- 👤 Each month your infant teacher will obtain information from you to see what and how your child is eating. We will follow your lead and only serve what you have introduced at home.



Complimentary foods are usually introduced to infants around 6 months of age. Once it is time for your infant to start solid foods, your teacher will notify the kitchen. There is a simple menu for infants between 8-12 months that are on solid foods.

- 👤 Toddler- age children start to become independent and begin learning family style dining in their classrooms. There are many benefits to family style dining including the development of social skills, gross motor and fine motor.
- 👤 Head Start children are served meals family-style as well. Head Start children who are part of a school district collaboration are served lunch cafeteria-style.
- 👤 Monthly menus are posted at the center to let parents know what is being served daily.
- 👤 Special dietary needs of children are honored with a note from the child's doctor which must include the following information:
  - the medical or special dietary need that restricts the child's/infant's diet,
  - the food that cannot be eaten,
  - the food substitution to be provided by the Head Start program, and













- if the food restriction is temporary or permanent.
  - Nutrition education is provided to parents at each center during parent meetings. Parents are also able to receive individualized nutrition education from the Program Nutritionist.
-  There is no outside food and drink allowed in any of the centers at anytime.
  -  If a child arrives more than one hour after breakfast is served, then a late breakfast will be served (cereal or cereal bar, fruit, milk).


## Breastfeeding

Centers have designated areas for mothers to breastfeed their child. Breast milk may be sent to the center for the child.

## Infant Safe Sleep

All staff will follow these safe sleep recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) for infants to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome/Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS/SUIDS):

-  Always put infants to sleep on their backs unless you provide Form 3019, Infant Sleep Exception/Health Care Professional Recommendation, signed by the infant's health care professional.
-  Place infants on a firm mattress, with a tight-fitting sheet, in a crib that meets the CPSC federal requirements for full-size cribs and for non-full-size cribs;
-  For infants who are younger than 12 months of age, cribs should be bare except for a tight-fitting sheet and a mattress cover or protector.
  - Items that should not be placed in a crib include: soft or loose bedding, such as blankets, quilts, or comforters; pillows; stuffed toys/animals; soft objects; bumper pads; liners; or sleep positioning devices. Also, infants must not have their heads, faces, or cribs covered at any time by items such as blankets, linens, or clothing.
-  Do not use sleep positioning devices, such as wedges or infant positioners. The AAP has found no evidence that these devices are safe. Their use may increase the risk of suffocation.
-  Ensure that sleeping areas are ventilated and at a temperature that is comfortable for a lightly clothed adult. If an infant needs extra warmth, use sleep clothing such as footed pajamas.
-  Place only one infant in a crib to sleep.
-  Infants may use a pacifier during sleep. But the pacifier must not be attached to a stuffed animal or the infant's clothing by a string, cord, or other attaching mechanism that might be a suffocation or strangulation risk.
-  If the infant falls asleep in a restrictive device other than a crib (such as a bouncy chair or swing, or arrives to care asleep in a car seat), move the infant to a crib immediately, unless you provide Form 3019, Infant Sleep Exception/Health Care Professional Recommendation, signed by the infant's health-care professional [§746.2426 and §747.2326].
-  Our child care program is smoke-free. Smoking is not allowed in Texas child care operations (this includes e-cigarettes and any type of vaporizers).
-  Actively observe sleeping infants by sight and sound.
-  If an infant is able to roll back and forth from front to back, place the infant on the infant's back for sleep and allow the infant to assume a preferred sleep position.
-  Awake infants will have supervised "tummy time" several times daily. This will help them strengthen their muscles and develop normally.

 Do not swaddle an infant for sleep or rest unless you provide Form 3019, Infant Sleep Exception/Health Care Professional Recommendation, signed by the infant's health care professional.

# Daily Routines

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## Arrivals and Separation Anxiety

Children often struggle to say goodbye to their families when it is time to come to school. All community-based centers open at 7:30 a.m. and parents are encouraged to help their children to make the transition into school by establishing a routine for drop-off with their children. This may include:

- Parents setting and keeping a regular bedtime so that children consistently get enough sleep each night;
- Parents setting a “get ready for school routine at home” to include children waking up at the same time, brushing their teeth, getting dressed, and leaving home at a consistent time;
- Parents reassuring the child that after the child plays at school, has lunch and a nap, the parent will return to pick up the child;
- Parents discussing with the child if someone new will pick the child up from school;
- Parents leaving the center quickly after one final hug. (It is harder for children to see the parent linger in the classroom after saying goodbye.)

## Classroom Activities








Education in the Head Start Program is focused on preparing each child to be successful and school ready. Our program provides a learning environment and experiences that promote School Readiness for children ages zero to five. Learning opportunities are provided based on the individual needs of the child.

Every year, Head Start establishes school readiness goals for all children and their families, closely monitors progress, and offers support through daily routines and experiences. (*School readiness goals are available in each Classroom*)

## Daily Routine and Experiences

The daily routine helps young children feel secure and independent. A typical day for a young child consists of routines and experiences that support the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. They are:

-  Language;
-  Literacy;
-  Social and Emotional Development;
-  Approaches to Learning;
-  Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development.



Infants and younger toddlers are unique and follow their own feeding and sleeping schedules. The daily schedule for these classrooms is completely based on the needs of the children. Parents can feel confident that their children’s teachers will read books, sing songs, provide enriching toys to play with, and allow them to eat and sleep when they need to. At this age, teachers will record all wet and dirty diapers, the time the diaper was changed; the food or bottles the child ate or drank, and the child’s mood that day. This information is recorded in **Learning Genie** and is available to review daily.

Older toddlers and three or four-year-old classrooms' daily routines support the essential components of the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes. A schedule is posted in every classroom.

Parents can get a copy from the classroom teacher.

### **Classroom Environment**

Each classroom is an organized play space. It is divided into learning centers that include reading, writing, music and movement, block play, math, sand and water play, drawing, painting, dramatic play, and outdoor discovery learning.

All learning centers have a wide variety of materials that are safe and appropriate for the age of the children and will help them to develop their skills. The classroom environment is assessed daily to ensure that it is safe, nurturing, engaging and provides appropriate learning opportunities.

### **Indoor & Outdoor Physical Activity**

Physical activities promote healthy growth and development. It helps build a healthier body composition and stronger bones and muscles. It also improves the child's cardiovascular fitness. Physical activities help in the development of better motor skills, concentration and thinking skills.

Outdoor learning time is an important part of school readiness. Exploring nature and working towards physical developmental milestones provide excellent opportunities for working towards individualized goals. Daily schedules will include 30 minutes of outdoor learning time in the morning and 30 minutes of outdoor learning time in the afternoon. For infants, teachers will ensure there are multiple types of equipment/materials appropriate for outdoor infant activities.

Weather Note: Child Care Licensing and Head Start recommends daily opportunities for outdoor play as weather permits. Site Supervisors are overall responsible for making decisions about allowing outdoor play each day. Site Supervisors should keep in mind that Child Care Licensing Minimum Standards do not have a minimum or maximum temperature that would not allow outdoor play.

Children should have ample opportunity to do moderate to vigorous activities, such as running, climbing, dancing, skipping, and jumping, to the extent of their abilities. These outdoor times can be curtailed somewhat during adverse weather conditions (i.e. extremely windy, rainy, or freezing conditions). If children are having indoor playtime due to extreme weather conditions, the time of indoor activity should be equal to the regularly scheduled outdoor playtime.

To promote physical activities indoors, all classrooms will plan music and movement activities that will be documented on the weekly lesson plan.







Teachers plan this instructional time with activities and toys that tie into the current theme and/or are connected to the children's individualized goals.

Recommended clothing and footwear – Children should wear clothes and shoes that are weather-appropriate. Closed-toe shoes are preferred as best safety practice while the children learn both indoors and outdoors. Playgrounds have mulch and can be a challenge with sandals and flip flops.

As infants begin to walk, they are required to wear shoes in the centers.






## Positive Guidance & Discipline Practices

-  All children are treated with respect with an understanding of each child's development and individual needs.
-  Children are never punished by pinching, shaking, hitting (spanking), biting a child, yelling at, humiliation, or rejection. Withholding food is never used as a punishment.
-  Instead of physical punishment, children are given clear directions and guidance.
-  Teachers provide consistency and encouragement for all children.
-  When behavior occurs, children are helped to understand why the behavior is not allowed and given choices about what is acceptable. The child's age and level of understanding are always considered when guiding behavior.
-  Staff are trained using the Conscious Discipline approach in social-emotional learning and classroom management best practices.

## Biting

When caring for infants and toddlers in small groups, the issue of biting commonly arises. However common this issue might be, it deserves attention so this behavior can be appropriately stopped.

There are many reasons why infants and toddlers bite. It is a complicated issue with no magic answers or solutions. Teachers and families need to work together to understand any changes or challenges children may be facing that could result in biting behaviors in the classroom or in the home.

-  Families will share information with teachers on how their child shows frustration and teachers will use this information to meet child's individual needs.
-  Teachers will provide active supervision at all times.
  - If there is a biting incident, the teacher will fill out the behavior incident report in Child Plus.
-  If there is continual biting:
  - Teacher will re-examine the prevention strategies to make sure all is being done to minimize a frustrating environment for the child.
  - Teacher will meet with the family to develop a plan to address consistency between center and home.
  - Teacher will keep careful notes to track the progress as biting incidents lessen.

## Toilet (Potty) Training

Potty training is an exciting and sometimes frustrating process for children and their families. Recognizing the signs of potty training readiness, supporting the child in the process, and setting shared goals for home and school are important for this process.

If a child shows signs of potty training readiness, the teacher, family advocate, and family will meet to set shared goals. In the meeting, the group will review and complete the Toilet Training Contract and will create a schedule. Teachers will review and share a copy of the "Learning to Use the Toilet" and "When Will my Child be Out of Diapers" handouts with the parents. Additional strategies such as common words to use with the child and how to celebrate success will also be discussed.



## Curriculum

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The Program uses student data, developmental screening data, and classroom observation data to measure student progress and teacher effectiveness. These tools allow the Program to individualized support for children to meet their specific needs and to provide personalized support to teaching staff in their areas of needed growth. The following curriculum are used to support teachers in their instruction of children. They are:

- Frog Street Infant, Toddler, and Preschool – Early Head Start & Head Start Curriculum
- Parent Powered – Early Head Start and Head Start for family engagement
- Learning Genie – Ongoing Parent Communication – Early Head Start & Head Start

## Services to Children with Disabilities

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Community Action, Inc. of Central Texas - Head Start Program must serve a minimum of 10% of Head Start's total enrollment for children with disabilities and special needs. The Head Start program views a comprehensive approach as beneficial to all children. Children learn to accept and be comfortable with each individual, varying of abilities and cultures when there are opportunities to interact with others.

The goal is to provide comprehensive education in a welcoming environment based on the principal idea that every child and family is valued equally and deserves the same opportunities and experiences as everybody else. Comprehensive education is about children with disabilities participating in everyday activities, just like their typically developing peers of the same age. It's about building friendships, being a member of the group and having the same opportunities as everyone else, so everybody can achieve.

## Mental Health

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The program is committed to ensuring the safety of each infant, toddler, and preschooler we serve. In keeping with the program's value of comprehensiveness, an enrolled child **will never be excluded** from program participation for a long-term period based on challenging behavior alone, provided that the child's social-emotional needs can be accommodated through reasonable modifications without either fundamentally altering the Head Start program or posing a significant safety risk to the child or to anyone in contact with him/her. In accordance with Head Start Performance Standards and Caring for Our Children Standards, the program may decide to temporarily suspend a child in severe cases of persistent challenging behavior as a last resort. This will only be considered in extraordinary circumstances when there is a serious threat to the safety of the child or others that cannot be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable modifications after all other strategies have been thoroughly documented and exhausted. Any decisions regarding the necessity of a temporary suspension will only be made at the Management level by the Mental Health Consultant, Mental Health and Disabilities Coordinator, and Head Start Program Director. Other relevant content area Coordinators may be consulted if needed.

## Family Services/Special Events

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### Special Activities

Parents are encouraged to participate in special events at our program sites. Special activities that take place during the regular school day are to promote bonding between the enrolled child and parent. This can include agency wide parent meeting, center parent meetings, nutrition activities, and parent/child activities.

Parents are encouraged to share in activities that fall outside of the Site's regular hours. These activities include the Fall celebrations, Family dance, movie night, and the Moving-On Celebration at the end of the year.

### Birthday Celebrations

The Head Start Program understands each family celebrates their child's birthday in their own special way. We will recognize birthdays in the classroom however we will not allow gatherings or individual parties in our centers. No outside food is allowed for birthday celebrations.

## Ways to Support Head Start

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### Policy Council

Policy Council members operate as the voice for the parents who have children currently enrolled in the program. The Policy Council is made up of Head Start parents and community representatives. A Policy Council member and an alternate member are elected from each site and meet once a month. The Policy Council functions as a shared governance board that approves all aspects of the Head Start program, including budgets and procedures of the program.

Policy Council members serve as a link to the parents through Parent Committees who share information with parents. Policy Council members receive training on their roles and responsibilities. For more information on joining the Policy Council, please talk to your child's Teacher, Family Advocate, or Site Supervisor.

### Parent Site Committee

Parent Site Committees are organized at each site. Every parent who has a currently enrolled child is a member of the Parent Site Committee. Activities for the Parent Committee include:

-  Working with the Policy Council to support overall program operations
-  Identifying parent interests and assisting with planning activities for parents
-  Offering the opportunity to participate in monthly planning
-  Identifying volunteer and community resources that are available to help families
-  Collaborating with local foundations and other organizations to advocate on behalf of families



### Advisory Committees

The Advisory Committees are parents and community members who are interested in different areas of the Head Start Program. We encourage you to join one or more of the following committees:

-  Education Advisory

Committee

 Health Advisory  
Committee

 Parent, Family and Community Engagement Committee

Talk to your Family Advocate or Site Supervisor to become an active participant.

### **Volunteer Requirements and Volunteer Confidentiality**

Volunteers at the center must complete a volunteer packet found on the agency website under the “give back” tab. Volunteers must complete orientation which includes a Volunteer Criminal Background Check. All volunteers are subject to Child Care Licensing Standards and the Head Start Program Volunteer Policies and Procedures, including the Volunteer Confidentiality Policy. Other regulations may apply, depending on the activity.

## **Admission and Eligibility**

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### **Admission**

Acceptance and selection into the Early Head Start and Head Start Program are based on Head Start regulations and criteria.

### **Operation and Program Procedures**

Parents and Guardians will be notified of changes in program procedures in person and writing. The Parent Center Board will have updates posted. Site Supervisors, Family Advocates, or Administrative Staff are available to answer any questions or concerns.

## **Confidentiality & Non-Discrimination Policy Statement**

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All information that you provide for your child’s enrollment/participation in our program is confidential and is seen only by the appropriate Head Start staff. Information will not be released to anyone without a court order or your written permission. The only exceptions are:

- \*instances of suspected child abuse or neglect,
- \*instances of suspected behaviors or threats that pose a danger to yourself or others.

## **Licensing and Regulation**

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### **Licensing Information**

The Head Start/Early Head Start Site’s most recent licensing inspection report is posted at each site. Parents may view the Minimum Standards for Childcare Sites by request in the Site Supervisor’s office or online at:

<https://hhs.texas.gov/doing-business-hhs/provider-portals/protective-services-providers/child-care-licensing/minimum-standards>.

Parents have the right to call or visit the local Child Care Licensing office at:

1901 Dutton Dr.  
San Marcos, TX 78666  
Phone: 512-753-2256  
[www.dfps.state.tx.us](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us)

### **Public Acknowledgement of Reporting Child Abuse/Neglect**

The safety of a child is everyone's responsibility. State law requires that staff must report any suspected child abuse or neglect to Child Protective Services immediately. If a teacher or other professional staff suspects that a child has been abused or neglected, they must file a report with a law enforcement agency or Child Protective Services immediately.

In Texas, anyone who suspects that a child is being abused or neglected has a legal obligation to report it. Reports should be made by phone to the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800- 252-5400 or online at <https://www.txabusehotline.org>. Under state law, any person reporting child abuse or neglect is protected from liability unless the report is made in bad faith or with malicious intent. When in doubt, report.

All staff members are trained yearly on child abuse and neglect.

### **Standard of Conduct and Ethics**

All parents, staff, consultants, and volunteers are expected to follow the program's standard of conduct. Adults must role model these standards of conduct by respecting the unique identity of each child and family. All adults must:

- Follow Program confidentiality policies concerning information about children, families, and staff members
- Ensure that no child is left alone or unsupervised while under your care.
- Use positive child guidance and discipline.
- Never use corporal punishment, emotional or physical abuse, food as reward or punishment, or deny a child's basic needs.

### **Notice of Gang-Free Zone**

Under Texas law, any area within 1000 feet of a child-care site is a designated gang-free zone. Crimes committed in zones that are related to organized criminal activity are subject to harsher punishment.

### **Drug and Alcohol Free Workplace**

Community Action, Inc. of Central Texas properties are declared drug and alcohol-free workplaces. It is prohibited to distribute, dispense, possess, or use controlled substance or alcohol at any site.

### **No Smoking Policy**

Community Action, Inc. of Central Texas does not allow any smoking, vaping, or the use of other tobacco products on its properties.

### **Soliciting**

Employees shall not solicit anything of monetary value from parents, contractors, potential contractors, families enrolled in the program, or potential families looking to enroll in the program. Employees of the agency are prohibited from accepting gifts, money or gratuities from any person receiving services from the agency. It is also prohibited for any employee to accept gifts, money or

gratuities from vendors or other persons performing services under contract to the agency. Exceptions to this include items such as a basket of fruit or candy which can be shared with other employees, or business lunches/dinners during which business is conducted.

## Parent Code of Conduct

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As a valued member of the Head Start community, I agree to support a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all children, families, and staff by following this Code of Conduct:

### 1. Respectful Communication:

- I agree to speak respectfully to all staff, children, and other families.
- I will resolve concerns and disagreements calmly and constructively.
- I will refrain from using threatening, aggressive, or profane language.

### 2. Safety and Supervision

- I will follow all program rules for drop-off and pick-up, including authorized release procedures.
- I will not leave children unattended on program grounds.
- **I will report any safety concerns to staff immediately.**

### 3. Confidentiality

- I will respect the privacy of other families and children by not discussing or sharing personal information.

### 4. Responsibility

- I will ensure my child arrives on time and regularly attends the program.
- I will keep emergency contact and health information up to date.
- I will notify the program promptly of any changes that may affect my child's participation.

## Consequences for Violating the Code of Conduct

Violations of the Parent Code of Conduct **may result in the suspension or termination of services** at the discretion of the Head Start Program Director. The program is committed to maintaining a safe, respectful, and supporting environment for all children, families, and staff. Serious or repeated violations-such as aggressive behavior, threats, or failure to comply with safety protocols-will be addressed promptly and may require a formal review.

## Denial, Suspension and Termination of Services

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Community Action Inc. of Central Texas may restrict access to Head Start sites of any individuals when their actions pose a risk to the health, safety, and well-being of any child, staff, or client. Head Start Performance Standards\* require programs to severely limit suspension and prohibit the expulsion of CHILDREN due to a child's behavior. However,

adults responsible for children who display any of the listed behaviors below may be barred from entering the site and participating in program functions. This will also apply to any restrictions placed upon an individual by the school district or any legal authority. The examples provided below are not an all-inclusive list.

\*Head Start Performance Standard 1302.17

**Denial of Services:** An individual and/or a family/household may be denied agency services when:

1. The family/household does not meet the eligibility requirements of the program services they are applying for.
2. It is discovered that the application for services contains false eligibility information.
3. Due to the limitations of funds.

**Suspension of Services:** Certain parent/guardian behaviors may result in suspension of services for an individual and/or family/household for up to 60 calendar days. In the event that criminal charges are pursued, services will be terminated.

1. Sexual harassment of agency staff or volunteers. Sexual harassment includes any offensive gesture, comment, or innuendo based on gender or sexual orientation.
2. Under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in an agency building or during a transport.
3. The possession, solicitation, or selling of illegal drugs in an agency building or during a transport.
4. Misuse of agency voucher or funds. The misuse of agency vouchers or funds may result in the termination of any financial assistance.
5. Theft or misuse of agency property. As a result of theft, criminal charges may be pursued.
6. Breach of client confidentiality. Breach of client confidentiality includes informing any other person of another client's medical, financial, or social information.
7. Failure to cancel transportation to a medical or dental appointment within 24 hours for a scheduled appointment may result in the suspension of client emergency
8. services.
9. Verbal abuse to agency staff or volunteers. Verbal abuse includes yelling at staff, calling staff names, or using foul language by the client or their family members.
10. Threats of violence to any staff member, child, or family enrolled in the program.

**Termination of Services:** The following behavior may result in the restriction of the adult's access to the site.

1. Firearms carried by a client in any agency building or during a transport.
  2. Physical assault to agency staff or volunteers. Physical assault includes any bodily harm done by client or their family members to the staff or volunteers. As a result of physical assault, agency staff may pursue criminal charges.
  3. Lack of client response to agency requirements for participation in any program.
  4. Repeated incidents of any of the behaviors that warrant the suspension of services.
  5. Clients have the right to pursue the agency grievance procedures to dispute a determination to deny, suspend, or terminate services.
  6. Threat of violence to any staff member, child, or family enrolled in the program.
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## **Conflict Resolution Plan Between Parent/Guardian & Head Start Program Staff**

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When a parent/guardian, or another family member, has a complaint or a conflict with a Head Start Program staff, the following steps must be taken to resolve the issue.

**Step One:** Respectfully address the issue with Head Start Program staff/Parent Guardian/or

a family member. If the issue is not resolved within two business days, move to step two.

**Step Two:** Respectfully address the issue with the immediate Supervisor of staff. If the issue is not resolved within two business days, move to step three.

**Step Three:** Respectfully address issue with Head Start Program Director, Danielle Engelke. Her email is [dengelke@communityaction.com](mailto:dengelke@communityaction.com). If the issue is not resolved within two business days, move to step four.

**Step Four:** Address issue with the Executive Director of Community Action, Inc. of Central Texas, Doug Mudd. His email is [dmudd@communityaction.com](mailto:dmudd@communityaction.com). If the issue is not resolved within two business days move to step five.

**Step Five:** Address issue with Policy Council Chair. If the conflict is not resolved within five business days, move to step six.

**Step Six:** Address issue with Community Action, Inc. Board President. If the conflict is not resolved within 10 business days move to step seven.

**Step Seven:** Address issue with the Office of Head Start Regional Office, Region VI Program Specialist at 214-767-2037.

