

Communication with Families

Head Start Performance Standards

§ 1302.50 (b) (2)

Policy

Effective two-way communication between staff and parent(s)/guardian(s) must be carried out on a regular basis throughout the program year. All staff will be welcoming of families, do their best to build a rapport with families, and be respectful of their culture and/or diversity.

Head Start/Early Head Start views parents as their children's first and most important teachers. We partner with families to support children's education and development. We must remember that families are experts in their own lives and in the lives of their children. When we understand and appreciate the family's perspective, we are more likely to set aside our own agendas and create a shared agenda with the family. When we have strong relationships with families, we help promote healthy child development and school readiness.

We value diversity. This means that we accept and respect differences. People come from various backgrounds and their customs, thoughts, ways of communicating, values, and traditions also vary. No two families are the same, even if they are from the same culture or are the same ethnicity. Never make assumptions; instead, stay curious and ask questions in a respectful manner.

We communicate with families on an ongoing basis.

We use newsletters as one method of communication with families. A monthly Parent Newsletter shares important program news and helpful information with all families. For children who receive Early Intervention or Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) Services, a separate monthly newsletter is distributed to connect families with other resources in the community specific to parenting children with developmental delays and disabilities.

Procedure

Family Contacts/Family Well-Being checks

- Teachers/Assistants Teachers will attempt to make at least one entry of substance communication per month for each child to reflect communication between school and home. During these contacts, staff will develop relationships with families and structure services to encourage trust and respectful, ongoing two-way communication between staff and parents. Please reference the **Family Well-Being Check Policy and Procedure** for more information on how to document these contacts and what should be covered during these communications with families.

Classroom staff will be welcoming to parents and acknowledge their presence. Staff will attempt to build a rapport with each family by:

- Greeting families in culturally appropriate ways.
- Smiling.
- Remembering their names and interests.
- Asking open-ended questions.
- Being genuine and sincere.
- Giving honest compliments.

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- Validating their feelings and concerns.
- Speaking directly to people.

When working closely with a family, program staff should also take time to reflect on their own biases and perspectives. This can be done by thinking about your own culture, where you grew up and what your own traditions were. Think about where your own set of beliefs comes from and how those might influence you to think or act a certain way.

Communication with families can include:

- Phone calls and/or text to parent(s)/guardian(s)
- Reminders or notes sent home
- Emails
- Messaging through ChildPlus or the Remind app
- Home Visits and Conferences
- Talking with families face to face when they pick up or drop off their children at class.

Communication with parents must be carried out in the parents' primary or preferred language or through an interpreter, to the extent that is feasible. Please see the **Interpretation and Translation Policy and Resources** for more information.

Parent Newsletter

Community Action Head Start shares a monthly newsletter for parents and guardians each month. This newsletter includes helpful information and ideas for parents and guardians, important updates, resources, and things to take back from Policy Council. It is in both Spanish and English with other languages available upon request. This is the only newsletter that is sent home to all Head Start and Early Head Start families.

After the first of each month, the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Specialist will send a copy of the current Parent Newsletter to the Home Visitors, HCDC Teachers, Family Services Teachers and the Coffee Creek Family Advocates. The newsletter will include the things to take back from Policy Council, information about available resources, and any important updates.

The Family Services Teachers, Home Visitors, HCDC Teachers, and Coffee Creek Family Advocates will post the newsletter in their parent board. The Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Specialist will distribute the newsletter via Remind with families.

The Disabilities & Mental Health (D&MH) Supervisor maintains a list of families of children receiving EI/ECSE services who have opted in to receive the D&MH Newsletter. The D&MH Newsletter contains information on parent trainings, support groups, advocacy groups and other resources for families of children with developmental delays and disabilities.

To establish the D&MH Newsletter Mailing List, the D&MH Supervisor and Program Assistant make contacts with families by phone, text and email in August and September of each program year and ask parents if they would like to join the mailing list. Throughout the year, the D&MH Supervisor will reach out to children who are newly enrolled or newly eligible for EI/ECSE services through email and ask families if they would like to opt into the Mailing List.

At the beginning of each month, the D&MH Supervisor distributes the D&MH Newsletter to families through mail and email.

The CACFP Supervisor distributes a monthly nutrition education handout along with the monthly menu. For larger centers like HCDC, BCDC and St. Andrews, the handout is sent to teachers via email. The handout highlights different nutrition education topics each month, along with community resources, gardening education, and nutrition related activities meant to engage the entire family. Families can provide feedback on the nutrition handouts and request topics via the annual parent survey.

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Additional Communication

If classroom staff would like to send a note or communication home to **all** families in their class, they must ensure that it is first reviewed and approved by the Program Area Supervisor. The note may also need to be translated into Spanish. Please see the **Interpretation and Translation Policy and Resources** for more information.