

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.

Teachers and Assistant Teachers will aim to make at least one meaningful communication entry per month for each child to reflect ongoing contact between the school and home. During these interactions, staff will build relationships with families and provide services that foster trust and promote respectful, two-way communication. For detailed guidance on these family contacts, refer to the **Family Well-Being Check Policy and Procedure**.

Procedure

Classroom staff will approach families with warmth, respect, and sensitivity, creating a safe and welcoming environment. Staff will intentionally build rapport with each family by:

- Greeting families in culturally respectful and affirming ways
- Offering genuine smiles
- Remembering and using families' names and interests
- Asking open-ended questions that encourage sharing
- Demonstrating authenticity and sincerity
- Providing honest and positive feedback
- Validating and acknowledging their feelings, concerns, and lived experiences
- Speaking directly and attentively to individuals

When working closely with families, program staff should also engage in self-reflection to recognize and examine their own biases and perspectives. This includes considering one's cultural background,

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upbringing, traditions, and underlying beliefs, and understanding how these factors may influence interactions and perceptions.

Effective communication with families can include:

- Phone calls and/or text messages to parents/guardians
- Reminders or notes sent home
- Emails
- Messaging through ChildPlus, Remind app, and ReadyRosie
- Home visits and parent-teacher conferences
- Face-to-face conversations during drop-off or pick-up times

All communication efforts should be conducted in the family's primary or preferred language whenever possible, utilizing interpreters or translation resources as needed. For further guidance, please refer to the **Interpretation and Translation Policy and Resources**.

Parent Newsletter

Community Action Head Start shares a monthly newsletter for parents and guardians from September to May. 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 all Head Start staff. The newsletter will include the things to take back from the Policy Council, information about available resources, and any important updates.

The Assistant Teacher will post the newsletter on their family 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.