

Family Handbook

Early Head Start
Center-Based Services



The leader in developing innovative solutions that promote healthy lives, thriving families, and caring communities.

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

Welcome to Head Start! We're excited to begin a new year filled with growth, learning, and memorable experiences. Thank you for choosing to join our program – we're thrilled to have you and your child as part of our Head Start family.

As your child's first and most important teacher, your role is vital to their development and success. Our program is built on strong partnerships with families, offering opportunities for growth, education, and support. We encourage you to be actively involved every step of the way. Your engagement will not only enrich your child's experience, but yours as well.

To help you get started, we've prepared this handbook to introduce you to our procedures, expectations, and goals. Our program follows the highest performance standards to ensure your child receives a quality early learning experience and is well prepared for the transition to Kindergarten.

Establishing daily routines and good attendance habits will lay the groundwork for your child's future success. Being on time and attending regularly helps build strong habits early on, promoting school readiness and lifelong learning.

At Head Start, we know that play is essential. Through play, children explore the world, learn to work with others, solve problems, and build physical skills. It's how they grow – and it's a whole lot of fun, too!

We understand that joining Head Start may be a new experience for you, and we want you to feel confident and informed. Please don't hesitate to reach out with questions, concerns, or ideas. Your child's teacher is always here to support you and your family.

We look forward to partnering with you for a safe, happy, and successful year of learning and discovery.

Warm regards,

Head Start Director

Program Goals

Early Head Start provides educational and social activities to **promote your child's overall learning and development for school readiness**. Programs are offered in caring and creative environments so children can explore freely and safely. Through positive interactions and guidance from staff, your child will also form friendships that will last a lifetime. School readiness is a key goal of the Early Head Start program. All children develop at individual rates and learning in the early years is enhanced through exploratory play and social experiences.

Early Head Start knows the major responsibility of raising children rests with parents. To bridge lessons learned at school with home, **Early Head Start welcomes and strongly encourages you to participate in your child's education**. We hope you will volunteer in the classroom, join us on field trips, participate in Parent/Teacher Conferences, or serve on the Head Start Policy Council.

Early Head Start not only provides services to your child but to you – the caregiver – as well. Classroom staff and Family Partners can help you find support to promote your family's overall health, lead you on a path to self-sufficiency, and help you reach your goals.

Early Head Start Classrooms

CLASSROOM TEAMS

Head Start Program Performance Standards require that the child-to-adult ratio in toddler classrooms is 4:1. Early Head Start has 2 classrooms in Otsego County. A team that includes two Classroom Teachers and a Classroom Aide leads each class, and a Family Partner offers ongoing family support, resources, and engagement. Educational programming is supported through nutrition, health, and family and community engagement services and activities, as well as transportation to medical or dental appointments as needed. In support of school readiness, staff will be addressed as Mr./Mrs./Ms. "First or Last Name" to prepare our children for mainstream Kindergarten. Parents are encouraged to do the same.

At times, Early Head Start staff may utilize video to record activities occurring in the classroom. The purpose of the video is to allow staff to assess what the children are learning and to reflect on the interaction between the children and their teachers. The videos offer supervisors an opportunity to support their staff by providing training to increase their professional development. We welcome you to observe your child's classroom and learn more about practices used to improve the delivery of program services.

The program uses *The Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers, and Twos* from Teaching Strategies to plan and implement content-rich, developmentally appropriate activities and experiences that support active learning and promote children's progress in all developmental areas. Teaching Strategies GOLD is the online assessment tool that is used by teachers to track each child's learning and development over time through observations of activities and interactions. Staff are trained to plan for each child's individual learning and development through ongoing observations and documentation. Families meet with their child's teacher to discuss and learn about their child's progress and to help set goals for the child's continued growth and development. Teaching Strategies GOLD is aligned with the New York State Prekindergarten Learning Standards and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Birth to Five. With parent consent, a child showing areas of concern may be referred for additional services or further developmental evaluations.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

Head Start Program Performance Standards provide a guide for teachers to follow that ensure all classroom activities are appropriate for children of all ages. When you visit your child's classroom, you will see:

- Many hands-on activities such as blocks, dramatic play, painting, writing, sand and water play, puzzles, cutting, etc. Young children learn best when allowed to explore and create within carefully planned intentional environments and learning experiences.

- An opportunity for children to make choices. During free exploration/center time, children choose the timing and location of their activities. Children learn more when they have some choice in the activity.
- Skill development and supported learning. Play activities are designed with a definite goal for the child's skill development. A variety of materials and activities are offered to support each child's individual development.
- Children participating in circle activities as a group. These activities give children an opportunity to learn how to function in a group, share ideas, and learn listening and cooperative learning skills.
- Healthy habits and safety-based instruction and modeling, such as hand washing, fire safety, safe toys, tooth brushing, and hygiene.
- Children resting/napping on an individual mat or cot in the classroom or designated rest area.
- Family participation and engagement. Every family, including families for who English is a second language, is encouraged to participate in all aspects of the program. Classroom teams use a variety of resources to support the home language and build the child's acquisition of English through stimulating and individualized language experiences.

FIELD TRIPS

Several times a year, the Early Head Start classroom will go on a field trip. Most trips are within walking distance from the center, while others may require children to be self-transported by parents. Parents are encouraged to accompany their child on field trips.

Field trips offer some of the most meaningful educational experiences for children, exposing them to environments that provide opportunity for exploration and choices. In order to assure direct and proper oversight of children in new environments and effective transitions, we strive for each child to be supervised by a designated adult, or a maximum of two children to one adult. For this reason, parents are highly encouraged to accompany their child on field trips.

Parents, family members, and community members are encouraged to participate in field trips to provide the additional supervisory support needed to create a true learning environment where curriculum goals and objectives are offered to the children as they would be in the classroom environment.

Like field trips, Fatherhood Initiative events encourage parent or family participation. These opportunities promote healthy relationships for the participating adult and child, and support all areas of the child's growth and development with long-term impact on positive outcomes for the child.

Parents or other family members will not only provide the necessary supervision, but by learning along with the child, families will be ready to participate in a variety of expanded learning experiences which further enriches child development, family engagement, and program goals.

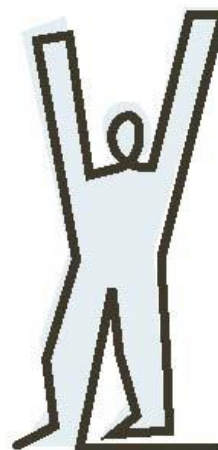
CELEBRATING HOLIDAYS

Any special events need to comply with established program guidelines and be organized to allow enough time for required approvals to be obtained. Early Head Start may include seasonal/holiday classroom activities that reflect different cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds of children and families in the program as well as around the globe. In planning activities, the classroom team, in collaboration with families, determine if activities might exclude any children. In such a case, staff will plan and offer other options.

Occasionally, Early Head Start is invited to join in community holiday/cultural activities or special events. Staff may accept the invitation and participate as appropriate.

Other celebrations:

- Family Traditions/Culture: Early Head Start encourages and supports families to share their home language, culture, traditions, and celebrations. Please talk with



your child's teacher if you would like to share information and/or schedule a classroom lesson or special event about your family's background.

- Birthdays: Parents may celebrate their child's birthday with a healthy, pre-approved food activity in the classroom. This **must** be discussed with the classroom teacher in advance to ensure the required approval process is followed. All food brought into the center or served during program hours must meet the minimum nutrition standards described in Early Head Start policy *N4 – Food Brought into Centers and Alternative/Emergency Menus Policy*.

GUIDANCE AND DISCIPLINE

We all learn best in a positive climate where we feel safe and supported. Early Head Start uses positive forms of guidance and discipline to help young children learn safe and cooperative behaviors. Positive guidance, such as reinforcing behaviors we want to see, builds social skills, mutual respect, and self-esteem.

The use of corporal punishment or verbal or emotional mistreatment is **strictly** prohibited in the Early Head Start program. Early Head Start policy *FS6 – Child Abuse and Neglect Policy* states in part, "This means no slapping, spanking, hitting, hair pulling, pushing, dragging, yelling, or demeaning actions are allowed at any time. Alternative means of discipline or control must be used."

SUPPLIES PROVIDED BY PARENTS

Early Head Start will provide all supplies needed for the day, except:

Clothing: Although efforts are made to keep your child's clothes clean (e.g., art smocks, bibs), we cannot guarantee clothing will not become soiled or stained. Please dress your child in comfortable, washable play clothes each day they attend. Children should also wear safe, non-slip shoes – **sneakers are best**. Additional clothing items needed are:

- A complete change of clothing (including underwear). Extra clothes are kept at the center. Please label clothing with your child's name so they do not get accidentally misplaced.
- Seasonally appropriate outdoor wear (e.g., raincoat, winter jacket, hat, mittens, and boots). Please talk to your Family Partner if you need help accessing these items.
- A child-sized bed covering/blanket for naptime only.

Medication: For children who require regularly prescribed medication and/or emergency medication (e.g., EpiPen, rescue inhalers), please refer to the *Medication Administration* section.

Please do not send any non-essential food or toys to the center.

When Early Head Start is Open

Early Head Start runs a 12-month program. Early Head Start classrooms close for recognized holidays, some school district breaks, and staff development days. A calendar of events, including planned activities and closings, is sent home monthly so you can plan accordingly.

UNPLANNED CLOSINGS

- Snow Days: The Early Head Start classroom will not open if the Oneonta school district remains closed for bad weather. This classroom will also be closed if Opportunities for Otsego closes for any reason, even if Oneonta school district is open or on a two-hour delay. **Please listen to local radio stations for announcements.**
- Two-Hour Delays: When there is a two-hour delay in the Oneonta City School District, Early Head Start will begin two hours after the regular daily start time. A small breakfast will be available at the start of the program day; subsequent meals will be provided according to the regular daily schedule.
- Facility Problems: Centers may need to close for mechanical problems (e.g., broken water pipe, electrical issues). Staff will contact families to make them aware of the center closure in these situations. If facility problems arise while your child is at the center, the early dismissal procedure will be followed.

- Early Dismissal: Early Head Start will close early for emergencies. If the classroom dismisses early, center staff will contact you to pick up your child – please be sure your contact information and emergency contact information is up to date.
- Illness: Early Head Start will not open (or may close early) if instructed by the Department of Health or if illness of staff creates a supervision/ratio issue. Staff will contact families to make them aware of the center closure in these situations. If a situation occurs while your child is at the center, the early dismissal procedure will be followed.

Notification of school closings will be announced on:

WZOZ (103.1FM or www.wzozfm.com)
 WSRK (103.9FM or www.wsrkfm.com)
 WCDO (100.9FM or www.wcdoonline.com)
 The Daily Star online (www.thedailystar.com)

WDOS (730AM or www.cnynews.com)
 WKTV (Channel 2 or www.wktv.com)
 WBNG (Channel 12 or www.wbng.com)

PESTICIDES

Early Head Start uses preventive pest control at our center and takes precautions to prevent the possible harmful effects of pesticides to children. Scheduled pesticide treatments occur after children have left the building for the day. Parents are welcome to request Pesticide Application Notification by submitting a written request to their Site Director, which must include the child's name, the parent name and signature, and date of request.

ATTENDANCE

Early Head Start expects your child to attend programming daily, as scheduled and on time. In the case of illness, medical appointments, or other situations that prevent your child from attending, it is mandatory you call the center and let them know of the absence within 1 hour of program start time. If you do not report your child's absence, center staff will call you that morning. Our expectation is that your child attends a minimum of 85% of the scheduled school days. Families are encouraged to plan vacations/travel while school is not in session. School success goes hand in hand with good attendance. Our efforts to promote school readiness for all children depends on each child's regular attendance and interaction with the teaching staff, peers, and the learning environment created within each classroom. Young children succeed in building academic and social skills over time when they feel confident and secure. A consistent, predictable routine that includes regular attendance at Early Head Start is one of the best ways for parents to support their children's growth and development.

Of special note:

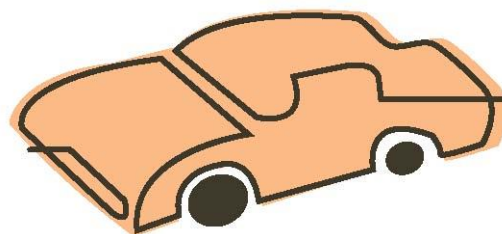
- Parents must let Early Head Start know of extended absences such as family vacations
- Excessive absences may result in a letter outlining your child's attendance record and/or your child being withdrawn from the program

DROP-OFF AND PICK-UP PROCEDURES

For the safety of all children, only authorized individuals can accompany your child to and from school each day. In addition to yourself, you need to provide the name and contact information of emergency contacts. Only these people will be able to pick-up your child.

Early Head Start will not release your child to anyone not listed on the emergency contact list without prior approval from you. If your child must be picked-up by someone other than an authorized individual, you must provide written permission. Staff will request photo identification to confirm the identification of the person picking up your child. The person designated to pick-up your child must be at least **16 years of age**.

Drop-off and Pick-up Procedures:



- Children must be dropped off/picked up at the established times
- Children must be signed in and out by yourself or an authorized individual upon arrival and dismissal

If you are delayed picking-up your child, it is expected that you will contact the classroom staff immediately. If the appointed pick-up time passes with no contact, staff will:

1. Attempt to contact you through the phone numbers provided
2. Attempt to contact individuals listed on the emergency contact list
3. Contact Child Protective Services and/or the police if there has been no contact/communication with you or anyone on the emergency contact list within 30 minutes of the program ending

If late pick-up is chronic, staff will meet with you to discuss addressing barriers to picking-up in a timely manner. If there are three late pick-up incidents within a two-week period, your child may lose his/her slot in the program.

Support Services

MEALS AND NUTRITION

Children receive $\frac{2}{3}$ of their minimum daily nutritional requirements through meals and snacks each day they attend Early Head Start. Menus are reviewed by a Nutritionist to ensure all meals are nutritionally balanced and offer a variety of tastes and textures for your child to enjoy. Menus are sent home each month for your reference.

Special Diets/Needs:

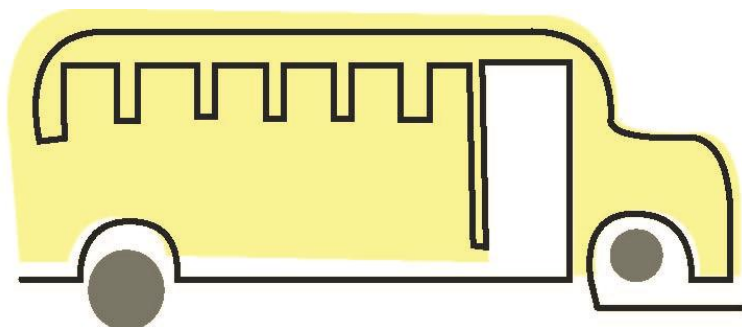
- **It is your responsibility to inform Early Head Start staff of any special dietary needs due to food allergies, medical conditions, or cultural requirements your child might have.**
- Children with special dietary needs will be served nutritionally equivalent foods appropriate for their individual needs.
- A signed Special Diet Request Form must be provided stating the special dietary/medical needs and substitutions. Any special diet needs associated with a medical condition will require documentation from your child's health care provider. If your child's diet resumes "back to normal", or has any other changes, we require notification in writing from your child's health care provider to resume a regular diet. Special diet documentation must be updated annually.

Food Brought into Centers Policy:

- Parents who want to bring in a healthy food/nutrition activity for the class **must** get prior approval through the classroom teacher. There is a 2-week approval process for any food activity not part of the regular daily menu.
- **All foods must be commercially prepared, packaged, and contain a food label. No home-prepared foods may be served at any Early Head Start function where children are present.**
- Parents are welcome to use the licensed center kitchen where available to prepare food for the class with the assistance of a ServSafe certified staff member. Classrooms in school settings can also arrange to utilize school kitchens. Contact center staff to arrange the best time and day for this activity. Staff can provide recipes and nutritious suggestions to parents for the children to enjoy that are fun and delicious.

TRANSPORTATION

Families are expected to drop-off/pick-up their child each day. Bus service is not available to children enrolled in Early Head Start.



Safety:

Per Federal law, every Early Head Start child must sit in an approved child safety restraint system.

Early Head Start will provide an appropriate car/booster seat for children transported in agency vehicles under special circumstances (e.g., doctor/dentist appointments). If one is not available, you may be asked to provide one.

HEALTH/ORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Early Head Start stresses identifying and treating health problems early and strives to improve and maintain the health of your entire family. As part of program participation, your child is required to be up-to-date on recommended health care visits, screenings, and immunizations. Your child will also receive regular screenings by trained Early Head Start staff to monitor their health and development. These small but important steps will ensure your child is in tip-top shape for learning.

Required Medical/Oral Health Documents:

Before your child can participate in Early Head Start, you must submit the following documents to the Health Specialist for review:

- A current physical** (including hematocrit/hemoglobin – completed at age 9-12 months or older, and lead results – completed at age 12 and 24 months or older)
- A copy of an up-to-date immunization record provided by your child's health care provider or a statement and schedule of immunizations "in-process" verified by your child's health care provider
- A Written Medication Consent form for a child who may require medication while at Early Head Start (see *Medication Administration* section)
- An Individual Health Care Plan for a Child with Special Health Care Needs (i.e. asthma, RAD, seasonal or environmental allergy, life threatening allergy, cardiac, etc.) must be completed by the child's health care provider

If you use Bassett, please let the health care provider know you are enrolled in Early Head Start and need the **daycare letter** faxed to Head Start at 607-433 8066.

Additionally, the Dental/Nutrition Specialist will need to review your child's oral health examination. Oral health exams are to be completed **prior to the first day of attendance**, and documentation of completed oral health exams needs to be submitted no later than 30 days after your child's first day in the classroom. Your child's health care provider can complete the 'Dentition' section of the physical examination form to be counted as an oral health exam. Oral health exams are due each year, or as recommended by your child's dentist. It is expected follow-up on any preventive and treatment recommendations will be completed.

Physical exams and immunizations must be kept up-to-date as per the American Academy of Pediatrics Well Care Schedule (18 months, 24 months, 30 months, and 3 years).

Please talk to your Family Partner if you need the name of a doctor or dentist, or need help getting health insurance coverage for you or your child.

Your child needs vaccines as they grow!

2025 Recommended Immunizations for Birth Through 6 Years Old

Want to learn more?
Scan this QR code to find out which
vaccines your child might need. Or visit
www2.cdc.gov/vaccines/childquiz/



VACCINE OR PREVENTIVE ANTIBODY	BIRTH	1 MONTH	2 MONTHS	4 MONTHS	6 MONTHS	7 MONTHS	8 MONTHS	12 MONTHS	15 MONTHS	18 MONTHS	19 MONTHS	20-23 MONTHS	2-3 YEARS	4-6 YEARS
RSV antibody	Depends on mother's RSV vaccine status						Depends on child's health status							
Hepatitis B	Dose 1	Dose 2			Dose 3									
Rotavirus			Dose 1	Dose 2	Dose 3									
DTaP			Dose 1	Dose 2	Dose 3				Dose 4					Dose 5
Hib			Dose 1	Dose 2	Dose 3			Dose 4						
Pneumococcal			Dose 1	Dose 2	Dose 3			Dose 4						
Polio			Dose 1	Dose 2	Dose 3									Dose 4
COVID-19					At least 1 dose of the current COVID-19 vaccine									
Influenza/Flu					Every year. Two doses for some children									
MMR								Dose 1						Dose 2
Chickenpox								Dose 1						Dose 2
Hepatitis A								2 doses separated by 6 months						

KEY

- ALL children should be immunized at this age
- SOME children should get this dose of vaccine or preventive antibody at this age

Talk to your child's health care provider for more guidance if:

1. Your child has any medical condition that puts them at higher risk for infection.
2. Your child is traveling outside the United States. Visit wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel for more information.
3. Your child misses a vaccine recommended for their age.

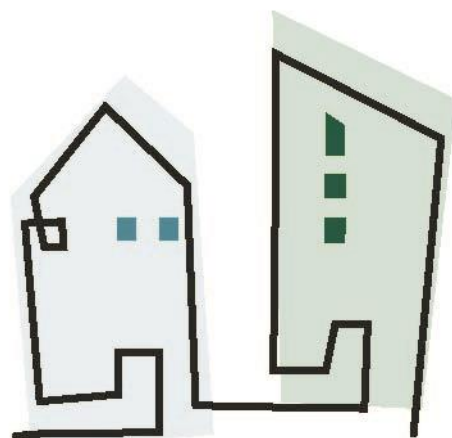


FOR MORE INFORMATION
Call toll-free: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
Or visit: www2.cdc.gov/vaccines/childquiz/



Preparing Your Child to Visit the Doctor and Dentist:

Before going to the doctor or dentist, please be sure you have an Early Head Start child physical exam and/or oral health examination form, with the top portion filled out with your child's information. Your Family Partner or other classroom staff can provide you with the forms if needed.



Doctor Visit:

1. Prepare your child by explaining the purpose of the visit. Explain that the doctor examines them to make sure their body is healthy and that all children go to the doctor for these visits.
2. Explain how the doctor/nurse will measure and weigh them, and how the doctor will look inside their mouth, eyes, ears, and listen to their chest and back with a stethoscope. Explain that the doctor may press on their tummy and listen and feel what is inside, tap on their knee, and may look quickly to see that the 'private area' is healthy. TIP: You can use a doll or a teddy bear to show your child what to expect during their doctor visit.
3. Above all, let your child know that you are okay and comfortable with what will happen when they visit the doctor, and that you will be

right there.

Dentist Visit:

1. Prepare your child by telling them what to expect when they visit the dentist. Explain how the dentist will examine their teeth with a light and mirror to see if they are healthy.
2. It is important that you do not over-explain the oral health visit or pass your fear of the dentist onto your child.
3. When at the oral health visit, let the dentist talk to your child and allow your child to answer; this gives your child a sense of control. The dentist will address you directly for information that your child is not able to provide.

Health and Developmental Screenings:

Early Head Start staff complete regular health and developmental screenings to make sure your child is developing as expected. You will be notified and invited when screenings are scheduled, and provided a copy of the results. If a screening result needs further action, Early Head Start staff will contact you.

Screenings completed by program staff may include:

- Vision/Hearing: This is a quick screening to identify any vision or hearing concerns
- Non-invasive Hemoglobin: If not completed at 9-12 months of age and/or results not provided by your child's health care provider
- Developmental Screening: This screening is a quick look at the following developmental areas: physical development, language development, academic skills/cognitive development, and self-help and social-emotional skills
- Devereux Early Childhood Assessment: A strength-based assessment of children's social/emotional development completed by staff and parents that also screens for behavioral concerns. Program staff and/or the Mental Health Specialist can meet with you and offer strategies for any mental wellness or social/emotional concerns you may have about your child. A list of community mental health providers is also available.

Exclusion Policy (refer to Sick Child Exclusion Guidelines):

It is important to ensure the safety and health of all of the children attending Early Head Start. For this reason, it is important for parents to know and understand the policy to temporarily dismiss a child from the classroom. It begins by determining if their condition poses a health hazard to other children and staff. A list of cases where a child would be temporarily excluded from class is noted in the Sick Child Exclusion Guidelines.

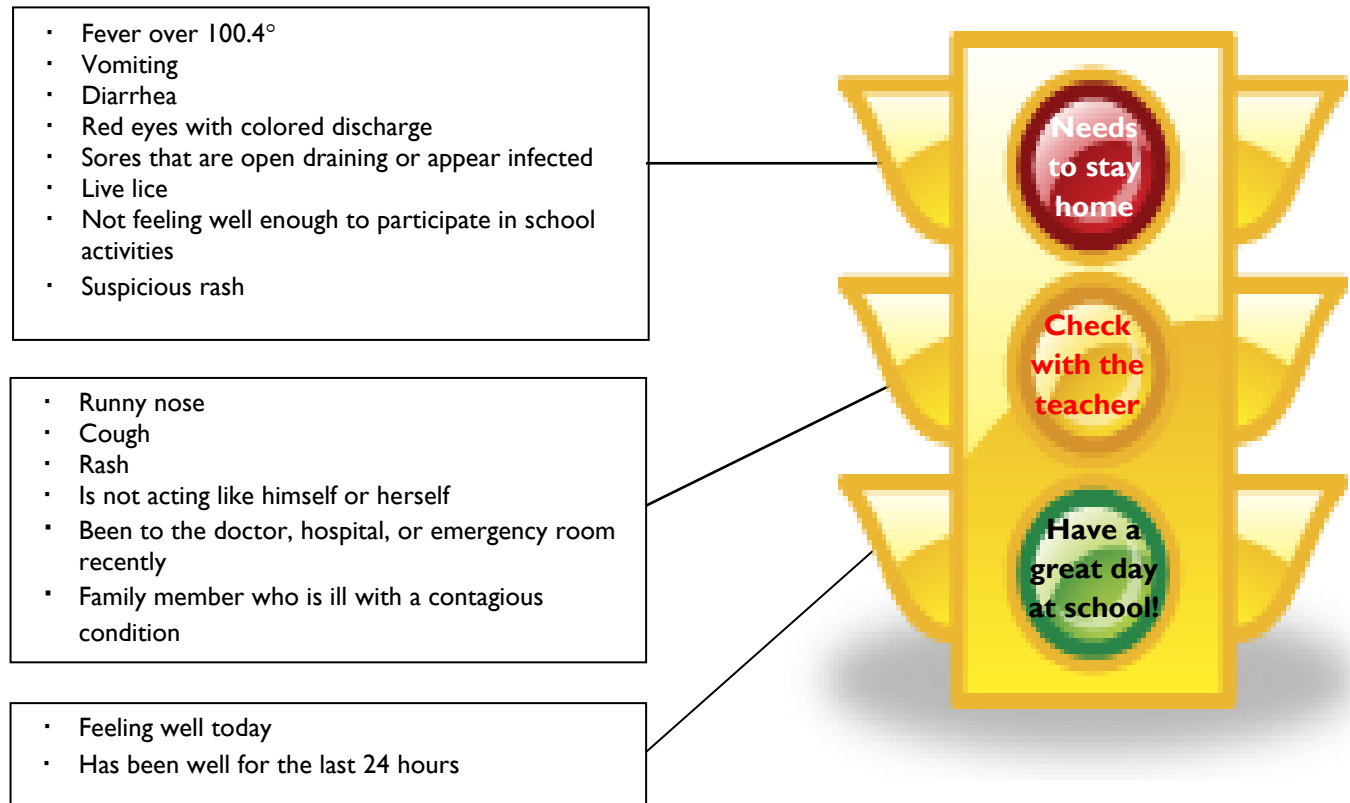
If you think/know your child has an illness that can be spread to others, please keep them home. Call your child's teacher to let them know that your child will be absent and why. The decision to phone a parent and ask them to pick-up their sick child is based on both the needs of that child and the need to protect the other children in the classroom from any exposure.

Parents will be called to pick-up their child if:

- Child's illness prevents him/her from participating in activities offered
- Illness requires more care than staff can provide without compromising the appropriate supervision of others
- Keeping the child at school poses an increased risk to that child or to the other children and adults with whom the child comes in contact

We must all work together to keep our children, families, and staff healthy!

Is your child well enough to be in school today? As a quick reference, use the traffic light below.



Health Emergency Policy:

As a parent, feeling confident about the safety of your child at the center they attend is extremely important. Early Head Start has a *H4 – Health Emergency Policy* to help alleviate your concerns.

Each center has staff that are knowledgeable and well-trained to respond quickly to health emergencies to ensure the health and well-being of children and are prepared to protect the children in their care.

Staff possessing current certification in infant and child CPR and first aid will provide first aid in health emergencies and will be on site during the hours that the program serves children. Designated staff will possess Medication Administration Training (MAT) certification and will be on site at any time that a child with a medication order is in attendance unless alternate coverage has been arranged for by the family. A list of CPR, first aid, and MAT certified staff is posted at each center.

Emergency first aid procedures and pertinent emergency phone numbers are posted prominently at each center.

The program relies on parents to share updated emergency contact information whenever there is a change to ensure that staff are able to contact you in an emergency.

In the event of an emergency:

1. Staff will call the child's primary emergency contact person
2. If the primary emergency contact cannot be reached, the secondary contact will be called
3. Center staff will continue to call the parent(s)/emergency contacts until someone is notified of the emergency

Staff will call 911 for professional medical emergency assistance and will notify parent(s)/emergency contact(s). If necessary, a designated staff person will accompany a sick/injured child on an ambulance ride and will stay with the child until a parent/guardian or parent-designee arrives. A copy of the Consent to Secure Appropriate Medical Treatment/Emergency Contacts form will accompany the staff and child to the hospital.

The Mental Health Specialist is available to children, families, and staff affected by the incident as needed.

As the parent/guardian of an Early Head Start child, your mental health and wellness is important too. A parent's mental health can have a significant impact on their child's mental and physical health, as well as their social, emotional, and behavioral development. Staff can provide you with resources that are available to address any mental health concerns you may be experiencing. If you experience a mental health emergency that requires rapid response by staff, they will provide support by contacting the Mobile Crisis Assessment Team (MCAT) to assist you with accessing immediate help, as stated in *H4 – Health Emergency Policy*.

The full *H4 – Health Emergency Policy*, as well as all Early Head Start health and mental health policies, are available upon request.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

When talking about children ages 0-5, mental health is referred to as social and emotional development. Mental health in early childhood includes reaching developmental and emotional milestones, learning healthy social skills, and learning how to cope and solve problems. All of these foundational skills are critical for school readiness and lifelong success.

Children with strong social and emotional skills are better able to:

- Form relationships
- Respond to and initiate interactions with adults and peers
- Participate and cooperate in social activities
- Regulate their behavior, problem solve, and manage and express emotions
- Show empathy
- Demonstrate knowledge of self and others
- Display positive self-esteem

One goal of Early Head Start is to help children cope with little problems and identify social and emotional concerns before they become bigger issues. Social and emotional problems can interfere with your child's learning and development; providing extra help with and education about managing emotions and behavior is simply another type of learning. This education helps prepare your child for a successful transition to Kindergarten and lays the groundwork for healthy social and emotional development throughout life.

Early Head Start employs a mental health professional who is available to assist and support children and families as needed. The Mental Health Specialist works with families and staff to support them in:

- Helping children show, manage, and talk about many different feelings
- Helping children build strong relationships with adults and other children
- Encouraging children to explore their environments
- Teaching children to problem solve
- Teaching children how to handle challenges

Early Head Start utilizes the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment to assess children's growth in meeting social and emotional developmental milestones. For children whose scores indicate they would benefit from additional support, the Mental Health Specialist is available to help teachers and parents work together to address the area of need. The aim is to build the adult's capacity to strengthen and support healthy social and emotional development of children, and enable parents to assist their child in building these skills.

Some of the mental health services available include:

- Individualized child and family focused observations and consultations (available in the home and in classrooms)
- Classroom observations
- Meetings with families and teachers to provide information related to children's mental health, problem solve individual child challenges, identify appropriate supports, or provide recommendations (such as a referral for additional outside mental health services, evaluations, or treatment)
- Helping families connect with community mental health wellness providers
- Providing information on social and emotional strategies to support positive behavior

Parents are the most important teachers and nurturers in a child's life. If you are concerned about or would like more information on your child's social and emotional development, contact your Classroom Teacher or Family Partner about how to access or utilize our mental health services.

FAMILY SERVICES

Each family in Early Head Start is assigned a Family Partner, whose role is to support your family during your time in the program. This staff is available to help with:

- Enrolling your child in the program/transitioning your child into Head Start Preschool
- Communicating with classroom staff and program Specialists
- Setting goals and working towards them
- Providing referrals to community services
- Finding and accessing medical and oral health providers, including assisting with getting insurance and transportation
- Organizing parent education workshops and parent committee activities
- Emergency needs like food, housing, or clothing

In Early Head Start, Family Partners visit your home at least twice a year, but are available if you would like more support.

TRANSITIONING

Early Head Start provides opportunities for you and your child to prepare for the transition to Head Start Preschool, such as visiting a Head Start Preschool classroom and participating in the daily activities offered. You will also have opportunities to participate in the transition process through meetings and activities that support your role as your child's primary educator. Parents are encouraged to participate in Parent Groups as a way to be actively engaged in their child's educational experience and provide suggestions and guidance to the program.

Children enrolled in a center-based Early Head Start classroom will transition to a Head Start Preschool classroom when they turn 3 years old, providing there is a space available. If a child in the Early Head Start classroom turns 3 when Head Start Preschool is not in operation, that child will be withdrawn from the Early Head Start classroom at the end of July to prepare them for a transition to Head Start Preschool.

Parent Involvement

Early Head Start acknowledges that you know your child best, are your child's primary educator, and should be involved in all decisions about their education and health. Early Head Start wants you to be



involved in your child's education and encourages you to communicate regularly with the classroom team, participate in classroom activities, and to volunteer.

VOLUNTEERING

You are an important part of Early Head Start and are encouraged to participate in programming any way your schedule allows. Some people choose to work directly with children, others like to work on classroom support activities (e.g., cutting, copying, coloring, etc.), and others may want to be involved in various parent committees.

Volunteering your time not only gets you more involved in your child's education, but it also helps the program meet funding requirements. Early Head Start is required to match 20% of its Federal funding with local dollars and donations (also known as "in-kind"). Each time you or a community member volunteer your time, the program is able to claim an hourly rate towards meeting this requirement. **Donated time means Early Head Start can continue to provide future services to children and families in our community.** **Please see your center or classroom team on how to properly document your volunteer time.**

Early Head Start also welcomes other family members, such as grandparents, aunts, or uncles, to volunteer. Each center can provide training to help volunteers learn about the classroom and how to appropriately interact with children in that setting. Please talk with your center's Site Director to learn more about volunteer opportunities and on-site training possibilities.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Parent Groups: You will automatically become a member of a center's Parent Group once your child is enrolled in Early Head Start. Parent Groups, with support from the Family Partner, plan activities and events that are of interest to families, and elect parent and community representatives to serve on Policy Council. Only parents/guardians of currently enrolled children are eligible to be members of that Parent Group; however, invited guests may attend.

Parent Group Fundraising: Parent Groups may choose to engage in fundraising activities that result in cash and non-cash donations to the Early Head Start program. Early Head Start cannot, in any way, be involved in fundraising, including, but not limited to, posting fundraisers on the agency Facebook page or using the agency logo. Parent Groups are excluded from using Opportunities for Otsego's Federal Identification Number and New York State Sales Tax Exemption for fundraising purposes unless their center's Parent Group elects to hold money raised in an Opportunities for Otsego account. All fundraisers must be presented to and approved by Policy Council prior to the fundraiser taking place.

Policy Council: Policy Council is the governing body of Head Start and helps make decisions concerning the entire program. Policy Council approves budgets, funding applications, program policies, and participates in the annual self-assessment process.

Policy Council is composed of representatives from each Head Start Preschool/Early Head Start center, the Head Start Preschool/Early Head Start home-based program, and the community. Representatives are elected to Policy Council at the beginning of the program year by a majority vote through each center's Parent Group. Each Early Head Start classroom has one parent representative membership slot on Policy Council to provide representation for that classroom.

Health and Mental Health Services Advisory Committee: The Head Start Health and Mental Health Services Advisory Committee (HMHSAC) meets two times a year to discuss health issues (mental, nutrition, oral, and physical) that affect families in our community. The committee consists of the Health Specialist, Dental/Nutrition Specialist, Mental Health Specialist, professional members of the health community, and parents.

The HMHSAC strives to maintain primary intervention and health promotion measures for the families and community we serve. The committee reviews program policies and procedures to ensure compliance with state and Federal regulations and explores opportunities to provide health education and services to the community. If you are interested in participating on the HMHSAC, let your Family Partner know or contact the Health Specialist or Dental/Nutrition Specialist.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE CLASSROOM TEAM

Early Head Start offers many opportunities to discuss your child's education, growth, development, and any concerns you may have. Ways of communication include:

- **Early Head Start Staff:** Teachers and Family Partners are available to answer questions and to offer you and your family support. This may require scheduling an appointment with staff in order to ensure they are providing you with their undivided attention and can secure a quiet space to discuss matters confidentially. To the best of their ability, staff will use the family's preferred mode of communication (phone calls, text messages, emails, etc.).
- **Notes and Flyers:** These will be distributed many times throughout the year to notify you of upcoming activities, announcements, and special events. Monthly calendars are sent home with information about special programming and classroom themes so you can plan to join scheduled activities.
- **Lesson Plans:** Teachers will post weekly planning forms in the classroom. You will also be invited to participate in planning lessons for your child through Teaching Strategies GOLD, the web-based program used by Early Head Start that allows parents and teachers to collaborate for curriculum development.
- **Newsletters:** Each center distributes a monthly newsletter with ideas/activities to do with your child to reinforce learning at home. The newsletter also contains information about the classroom, activities, upcoming events, and menus.
- **Parent Boards:** Be sure to check the parent board in the classroom for important news and other information such as:
 - Weekly menus;
 - Job openings within Opportunities for Otsego, including Head Start Preschool/Early Head Start;
 - Policy Council and Parent Group meeting minutes.
- **Home Visits:** Family Partners and teachers will each arrange home visits two times per year. Meeting in the home allows your family and staff to build rapport and work together to discuss and establish your family and personal goals in a comfortable setting.
- **Parent/Teacher Conferences:** Conferences will be conducted three times a year at your child's center. During the Conference, teachers will share information about your child's development and ask you to help set goals for the next period. Teachers may also share samples of your child's work and observations from the classroom.
- **GoEngage Parent Portal:** You can communicate with your child's teachers, sign your child in and out, and receive text message reminders and important program information/updates when you create a Parent Portal account. Use the following link to register and get started: <https://portal71.cleverex.com?VanillaBunny8Beaks>.

HEARING PARENT CONCERNS

Should you have a concern about the functioning of the program, please follow the steps below:

1. Discuss the issue with the person/persons involved (e.g., if you have a concern about the classroom, talk to the Classroom Teacher first). If that does not resolve the problem...
2. Talk to the Site Director. If the problem persists...
3. Additional steps may be made through the Head Start management team.

Your opinion and viewpoint are important to us and we invite you to share your suggestions.

Family Code of Conduct

It is the role of everyone involved in Early Head Start to treat all staff, families, and children with respect, dignity, and humanity. We understand that people come from different backgrounds, cultures, religions, races, and ethnicities and we accept and support everyone. It is expected that all adults will conduct themselves in the following manner in all program settings:

- With courtesy

- With respect
- With patience
- By treating people the way you want to be treated
- By modeling how we want our children to treat others
- By acknowledging and celebrating the cultures and practices of other people and families
- By dressing appropriately

Under no circumstances will the following behaviors be tolerated:

- Belittling or degrading of anyone;
- Physical or verbal punishment of children
- Threats to staff or parents/guardians
- Swearing or cursing
- Smoking
- Quarreling, verbal fighting, raising of voices with staff or parents/guardians
- Violation of center/program safety practices and policies
- Bringing drugs, alcohol, or weapons to centers or events

If these behaviors occur, the person in violation will be asked (privately if possible) by a staff person to stop the inappropriate behavior. If individuals continue to quarrel, verbally fight, or threaten, staff will call the police. Early Head Start reserves the right to terminate service to any client who violates this code of conduct.

We encourage families to be part of daily and special activities and understand that parents/guardians may be taking photographs of their child during these times, however, we ask that you respect the confidentiality of other children attending the program by only taking photographs of your child.

Behavior Management Procedures

Rationale for Early Head Start Behavior Management Procedures:

Early Head Start recognizes that children are learning how to function in a classroom setting. They need opportunities to learn what appropriate behavior for school is. School should supplement parents' efforts in teaching children how to behave. Cooperation between home and school is critical. The following procedures are aimed at creating an ideal atmosphere in which your child can learn.

Each classroom implements these three rules:

1. **We keep ourselves safe**
2. **We keep friends safe**
3. **We keep our things safe**

The classroom team, along with the children, will give examples of behaviors for each rule that support a cooperative, safe classroom.

If a behavior for a specific child interferes with learning or safety for that child or others, a Positive Guidance Plan will be developed through a meeting between Early Head Start staff and the parents/guardians to create and implement a plan to address the areas of concern. Staff will monitor and reinforce appropriate behaviors on an individual basis in the classroom. Staff will strive to teach the child age appropriate behaviors and social skills to support the child's relationships with peers and staff. Additional resources, such as a Wellness Consultation, will be available to support the child and family.

Should a child engage in a behavior that is too dangerous for staff to safely manage, the child may be sent home, as a last resort, and an individualized schedule will be implemented until a Positive Guidance Plan is developed with input from

parents/guardians, the Mental Health Specialist, and other relevant Specialists. Parents/guardians will be called immediately, and may be required to come and pick-up the child. Behavior that may result in a child being sent home may include, but is not limited to, excessive physical aggression towards adults or children such as hitting, biting, choking, spitting, throwing things that may injure someone, or endangering themselves by running away from a supervised area.

Child Abuse, Neglect, and Domestic Violence

It is the responsibility of the Early Head Start staff to help keep children safe. Sometimes a staff member may suspect that a child has been abused or neglected. Sometimes children will tell a teacher, other staff members, or other adults that they have been abused.

New York State Law requires that any Early Head Start staff member who **suspects** that a child has been abused or neglected **must** report the circumstances to the proper authorities. Opportunities for Otsego's Early Head Start employees are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. By law, a mandated reporter is required to report any suspected incidences of child abuse or neglect. All reports are kept confidential.

Being a parent is a tough job and sometimes it becomes overwhelming. If you feel that you or someone in your family needs help to avoid abusing your child, or if you have issues of domestic violence in your home, talk to a member of your classroom team or to your Family Partner who can direct you to someone who can help you.

If you or someone in your family has been reported to Child Protective Services and you feel that you need support, please contact your Family Partner or the Family Services Specialist for assistance, information, and guidance.

If you are suspicious that a child is either being neglected, abused, or is present during a domestic violence incidence, it is your responsibility to call and make a report. Remember that all reports are kept confidential.

Early Head Start staff will offer training for parents in the area of child abuse and neglect.

Medication Administration

Whenever possible, medication is to be administered at home. In the event that medication needs to be administered while your child is at Early Head Start, please speak with your child's Classroom Teacher or Family Partner **prior** to bringing in the medication for your child. New York State Day Care Regulations and Head Start Program Performance Standards have **specific requirements** that must be completed **prior** to administration of any medication (including over the counter medication). These requirements **MUST** be met in order for your child to attend programming.

When a child has a written medication order from a health care provider in place, the medication must be at the center anytime the child is present. Excess or expired medication, prescribed or over the counter, will be returned to the child's family. Medication not retrieved by the parent within two weeks of notification or the child's last day in the program will be properly disposed of by center staff.

Notification of Disclosure of Personally Identifiable Information

Early Head Start is required to collect personal information about yourself, your child, and other members of your household. The purpose of requesting this information is to determine program eligibility, identify household needs, satisfy state and Federal reporting requirements, and get needed services in place. There may be times the program is required to share personally identifiable information with outside parties. Typically, we seek written consent before disclosing information. Consent is voluntary and may be revoked at any time. Occasionally Early Head Start may disclose information without parental consent to:

- Officials within the program or acting for the program to deliver necessary services
- Officials within the program, acting for the program, or from a Federal or state entity to conduct program audits or evaluations, or for enforcement of or compliance with Federal legal requirements of the program

- Officials within the program, acting for the program or from a Federal or state entity to conduct studies of child/family outcomes and improve the quality of programs
- Appropriate parties in order to address a disaster, health or safety emergency during the period of the emergency, or a serious health and safety risk
- Comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena
- The Secretary of Agriculture or an authorized representative from the Food and Nutrition Service to conduct program monitoring, evaluations, and performance measurements for the Child and Adult Care Food Program
- A caseworker or other representative from a child welfare agency who is legally responsible for a child who is in foster care placement
- Appropriate parties in order to address suspected or known child abuse and neglect

Parent Resources

For additional information pertaining to ensuring your child's safety, please see the resources listed below:

- New York State's Sex Offender Registry: <http://www.ny.gov/services/search-sex-offender-registry>
- Kidpower Stranger Safety – Assault and Kidnapping Prevention: <https://www.kidpower.org/stranger-safety/>
- American Society for the Positive Care of Children: <http://americanspcc.org>
- Bullying Prevention: http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/training-center/hrsa_guide_parents-and-caregivers_508v2.pdf; <https://www.kidpower.org/library/article/cyber-bullying/?gclid=CIGbuYX2nscCFZWRHwod0f4Axw>
- Car Seat Recalls: <http://www.nhtsa.gov>
- New York State Office of Children and Family Services website: <https://ocfs.ny.gov/>
- Office of Children and Family Services Help, Empower, Reassure, and Support (H.E.A.R.S) Family Line: 1-888-554-3277 (Monday – Friday, 8:30am-4:30pm)
 - Assists parents and families by providing resources and referrals to a variety of services (including food, housing, clothing, medical and behavioral health care services, parenting education, and child care)
- New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) website: <https://opdv.ny.gov/>
- Prevent Child Abuse New York Helpline: 1-800-CHILDREN (Monday – Friday, 9am-4pm)
- United Way: 2-1-1 (24 hours, 7 days)
 - This confidential call center connects people with locally available help (including housing, food, transportation, and health care)
- Parent Handy Book (see QR code below)
 - This parent handbook provides information about the different community resources available in Otsego County



My Center's Contact Information

Center: _____

Site Director: _____

Classroom Teacher (if applicable): _____

Family Partner: _____

Program Hours: _____

Phone Number: _____