



# Parent Handbook

## 2023-2024

**Easterseals Early Learning Services**  
**Chicago and Suburban Cook County**  
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# **Welcome to Easterseals Metropolitan Chicago Early Learning Services**

Welcome to our Early Learning Services, where you, your child, and every member of your family are very important to us. The purpose of this handbook is to give you some basic information. This Parent Handbook includes information on program options, services, activities, policies and procedures, and our mutual responsibilities. Information for the specific program your child is in can be found at the end of this handbook in the addendums. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

## **What Are Our Early Learning Services?**

Our Early Learning Services are comprehensive child and family development programs for pregnant women and children ages birth to five and their families. They include Head Start (HS), Early Head Start (EHS), Prevention Initiative (PI) and Preschool for All (PFA). These programs promote school readiness and future success for children and accomplishes this through family partnerships and parent engagement. Our staff works closely with all our families to ensure that every family feels heard, supported, valued, and has a sense of belonging to a community.

## **What services are provided?**

- Educational Activities
- Developmental Screenings
- Healthy Meals and Snacks
- Health and Nutrition Services
- Family Support and Referrals
- Qualified Teachers in each classroom
- Parent and Family Engagement Activities and Services
- Access to a Nutritionist and Social-Emotional Specialist/Consultant

## **Easterseals Early Learning Services**

Easterseals Early Learning Services (EELS) offers both home based and center-based services through two directly operated centers and partnerships with private childcare centers. EELS operates programs in both Chicago and in the South and West Suburbs of Cook County as a grantee through the Office of Head Start. Easterseals also receives funding from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to provide Prevention Initiative (PI) and Preschool for All (PFA) services in suburban Cook County.

### **In Chicago:**

- We serve 349 children ages 3-5 in Head Start, and 372 children ages 0-3 in Early Head Start as a grantee.
- Center based services for HS and EHS services are 7 hours per day, 5 days per week, 12 months per year.
- EHS Home Based is offered on four caseloads serving families on the south side. Home Based Educators deliver EHS services through weekly 90-minute home visits with the parent and child and twice-monthly group socialization experiences, 12 months per year with a minimum of 46 visits per year.
- Pregnant women are served through EHS Home Based. Infants born to enrolled pregnant women can transition to either home based or center based EHS based on parent preference and available vacancies.

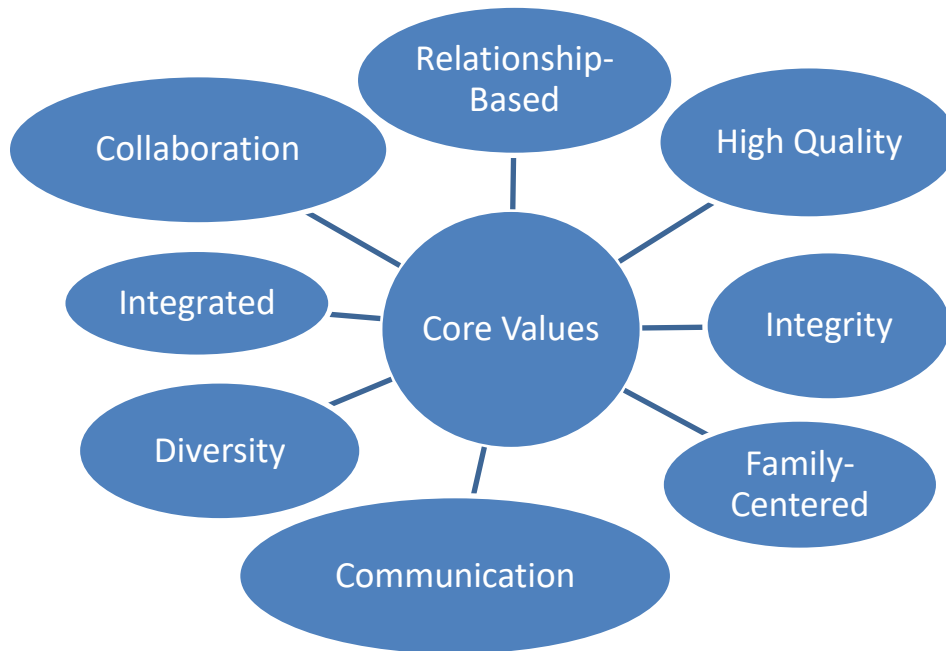
### **In Suburban Cook County:**

- We serve 644 children ages 3-5 in Head Start and 528 children ages 0-3 in Early Head Start.
- Center Based services for HS and EHS are 7 hours per day, 5 days per week, 12 months per year.
- Prevention Initiative services are provided for about 300 of our center based children ages 0-3.
- Preschool for All services are provided for over 300 of our center based 3-5 aged children.
- EHS Home Based is offered in suburban Cook County through two programs that serve families in the South and West suburbs. Home Based Educators deliver EHS services through weekly 90-minute home visits with the parent and child and twice-monthly group socialization experiences, 12 months per year with a minimum of 46 visits per year.
- Pregnant women are served through EHS Home Based. Infants born to enrolled pregnant women can transition to either home-based or center-based EHS based on parent preference and available vacancies.

## Mission Statement

We are a non-profit, community-based Early Learning partnership program that recognizes individual strengths and empowers children and their families that have limited access to resources. Through supportive collaborations with private early childhood programs, our integrated teams provide hands-on, comprehensive quality services to give children and their families the opportunity for a brighter future and a head start to success.

## Core values



## Parent Engagement and Involvement

The relationship between parents and the program is crucial for all that we do. Parents are the primary educator and advocate for their own children. Our Early Learning Services staff will walk alongside you in your role as parent while your child is enrolled in the program. You will be encouraged to take an active role in the services provided to your child and family. You will be invited to participate...

- At enrollment by giving us information that will help us provide you and your child support
- In home visits and parent-teacher conferences
- In planning for your child's transitions
- To volunteer in the program
- To take leadership in the program
- In at-home learning activities for you and your child
- In completing a family assessment
- In developing individualized goals for you and your child

# Parent involvement in program governance

## Parent Committee (at each site or for the Home Based program)

- Made up of all the Head Start/Early Head Start parents at the site or in the home based program
- Meetings are held at least quarterly
- The Parent Committee elects officers (Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary) who take a leadership role at meetings and at the site
- The Parent Committee works in partnership with key site staff to contribute to decision-making and planning at the site level regarding parent activity funds, curriculum, etc.
- The Parent Committee also elects a Parent Representative to the agency-wide Policy Council (Suburban) or delegate-wide Parent Policy Committee (Chicago)

## Policy Council

Made up of Parent Representatives elected by parents from each Easterseals Head Start/Early Head Start partner site and from each home based program, as well as community representatives elected by the Policy Council Parents.

- If a site has both Head Start and Early Head Start, parents elect a Head Start Parent Representative and an EHS Parent Representative
- Meetings are held monthly at a central location or virtually
- The Policy Council elects officers (Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Secretary) who take a leadership role at meetings and in the program
- The Parent Policy Council works in partnership with key management staff to be informed, develop, review, and approve or disapprove the following policies and procedures and submit decisions to the governing body (Easterseals Board of Directors) regarding:
  - Activities for parent involvement/engagement
  - Program recruitment, selection, and enrollment priorities
  - Funding applications/amendments
  - Budget planning, including reimbursement and participation in Parent Policy Council/Committee activities
  - Personnel policies and decisions, including criteria for employment and dismissal of program staff
  - Recommendations on partner sites

## Responsibilities of Parent Representative to the Policy Council/Committee:

- Attend all Policy Council/Committee meetings
- Share information and decisions from the Policy Council with the site Parent Committee
- Bring relevant parent questions, issues, and ideas from the site Parent Committee to the Policy Council/Committee
- Encourage parent participation at all levels of the program



## School Readiness Goals

Easterseals Early Learning Service's Approach to School Readiness means that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children. Our Early Learning programs encompass a strong, clear and comprehensive focus on all aspects of healthy development, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional development all of which are essential to children getting ready for school. In collaboration with our private child care partner centers, Easterseals Early Learning Services has established school readiness goals which include the expectations of children's status and progress across domains of approaches to learning, social and emotional development, language and communication, cognition, and perceptual motor and physical development, that will improve readiness for kindergarten ensuring children possess the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life. For parents and families, school readiness means they are engaged in the long term, lifelong success of their child. Early Learning Services recognizes parents are their children's primary teacher and advocate. **The program consults with parents to establish program, school readiness, parent, family, and community engagement goals. These groups work together to promote school readiness and to engage school systems and families as their children make the transition to kindergarten (see handout).**

## No Fee Policy

Families enrolled in Easterseals Early Learning Services (HS/EHS/PFA/PI) cannot be charged fees, including registration fees, late fees, fees for field trips, etc., be required to do any kind of fundraising or to bring supplies.

**For families that have the Child Care Assistance Program subsidy (through Action for Children or DFSS), the co-payment is an allowable fee.**

## Continuity of Enrollment

We make every effort to continue a child's enrollment within the guidelines for Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS).

For **Head Start**, an eligible child can continue enrollment for the program year that they start and into the next program year (a program year generally starts and ends in August ). We must reverify eligibility for a child to continue for a 3rd year.

For **Early Head Start**, an eligible child remains eligible as long as she/he is enrolled until she/he ages out (age 3). When transitioning to Head Start, we need to verify eligibility again.

## Mandated Reporting

All Easterseals Early Learning Services staff, as well as all staff employed in a childcare setting, are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse or neglect. This means that they are required by law to report suspected child maltreatment immediately to the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) when they have “reasonable cause to believe” that a child known to them in their professional capacity may be an abused or neglected child. Every effort will be made to discuss the situation with the family prior to making a report. The center may not interfere with DCFS proceedings. If a caseworker comes out to visit a child, they will be allowed to do so. Each year, staff receives training on recognizing signs of possible abuse or neglect.

The DCFS Hotline number is: 1-800-252-2873 (1-800-25ABUSE)

## Suspension and Expulsion

Children cannot be suspended or expelled from any Easterseals Early Learning Services program activity such as classroom experiences, daily routines, field trips, walks, playground, special activities, etc. due to challenging behavior. Teachers and staff will work collaboratively with families to provide solutions to assist children who are struggling with challenging behavior and individualize supports to meet their needs.

## Guidance/Discipline Policy

During the first five years of life, children are just beginning to learn how to self-regulate and handle their own emotions, therefore teachers and center staff must guide and support children to navigate challenges in the classroom. It is the responsibility of center staff to ensure classrooms are safe environments that support positive social and emotional growth of children. Therefore challenging behavior must be addressed in a manner that supports child development.

Challenging behavior is defined as a behavior that:

- interfere with a child’s learning, development and success in play and building friendships
- is harmful to the child, other children or adults
- puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure

Challenging behavior can be direct behaviors such as hitting, kicking, pushing, biting or indirect such as teasing, ignoring rules or instructions, excluding others, name calling, destroying objects, tantrums etc.

Discipline and guidance will never:

- Be punitive
- Physical
- Used to deny children of activities, food, rest or exclude them from their peers

**Adults model positive behavior-** teachers and center staff should model cooperation and positive talk.

(Guidance/Discipline Policy continued on next page)

**The physical environment is designed to minimize conflict-**

- Classroom areas should be clearly defined so children will know what areas they can go to for activities.
- A quiet/calming area will be designated for children to use.
- Materials should be accessible and ready for children to use.
- Center staff should provide multiples of popular items.
- The classroom should be designed to discourage running (no large open areas) and children can be seen at all times.
- Visuals should be posted around the room to reinforce rules and expectations

**Teachers maintain age-appropriate expectations for children.**

- Teachers will ensure children do not have extended wait times.
- Teachers will limit the length of large group times and teacher directed activities.
- Children should be given large blocks of time to choose activities.

**Teachers closely observe and supervise children's activities and interactions.****Teachers help children verbalize their feelings, frustrations, and concerns.**

- Teachers will help children to understand their feelings through conversations, language modeling, stories, pictures, visuals, feeling check-ins etc.
- Teachers will describe problems, brain-storm solutions and talk about consequences of our actions.
- Teachers will encourage children to solve their own problems in a positive way through the use of strategies such as the Pyramid solutions tool kit and teacher modeling.
- Teachers will show children that cooperation and teamwork is valued through daily interactions with the children, parents, and coworkers.

**When teacher intervention is necessary, teachers will use respect.**

- Teachers will use developmentally appropriate strategies such as redirection, natural consequences, appropriate choices, and positive reinforcement.
- No child will ever be humiliated, shamed, made to feel frightened, or subjected to physical or verbal abuse by any staff member.
- Food, water, rest, and bathroom privileges can never be withheld due to a child's behavior.
- Teachers and staff will not place children in "time out" or exclude children from activities such as large group times or outdoor play.
- Teachers and staff will not threaten to send children home or to send a negative report home.
- Calm areas equipped with various materials and resources will be accessible with items such as social emotional books, fidgets, visuals that guide children in the calm down process etc.
- Teachers will partner with families and Easterseals staff to determine possible causes of behavior in an effort to assist the child in the future and prevent behaviors.

**Ongoing Challenging Behavior/ Dangerous Behavior**

- Teachers will follow the Behavior Review Process for any children that have ongoing challenging behavior or behavior that is harmful to themselves or others.

**For consistency, when in the center or on the grounds, parents and family members are expected to follow this guidance/discipline policy in disciplining their own children.**

**All staff and volunteers must follow this guidance/discipline policy at all times.**

# Code of Conduct for Staff and Parent/Guardian (Volunteer)

As a staff person, consultant, contractor, or volunteer supporting the Early Learning Services Program, all will abide by the Easterseals Standards of Conduct as listed below:

- (i) Implement positive strategies to support children's well-being and prevent and address challenging behavior;
- (ii) Will not maltreat or endanger the health or safety of children, including, at a minimum, that I must not:
  - (A) Use corporal punishment;
  - (B) Use isolation to discipline a child;
  - (C) Bind or tie a child to restrict movement or tape a child's mouth;
  - (D) Use or withhold food as a punishment or reward;
  - (E) Use toilet learning/training methods that punish, demean, or humiliate a child;
  - (F) Use any form of emotional abuse, including public or private humiliation, rejecting, terrorizing, extended ignoring, or corrupting a child;
  - (G) Physically abuse a child;
  - (H) Use any form of verbal abuse, including profane, sarcastic language, threats, or derogatory remarks about the child or child's family; or,
  - (I) Use physical activity or outdoor time as a punishment or reward;
- i. I will respect and promote the unique identity of each child and family and do not stereotype on any basis, including gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or family composition;
- ii. I will comply with program confidentiality policies concerning personally identifiable information about children, families, and other staff members in accordance with subpart C of part 1303 of this chapter and applicable federal, state, local, and tribal laws; and,
- iii. I will ensure no child is ever left alone or unsupervised.
- iv. I will not solicit or accept personal gratuities, favors, or anything of significant monetary value from contractors or potential contractors.
- v. I will adhere to the Head Start Performance Standards, Head Start Act, and Easterseals policies and procedures in determining eligibility, verifying eligibility information, and maintaining an accurate eligibility determination record for all children and pregnant women enrolled in the Head Start or Early Head Start program.
- vi. I will not solicit or accept personal gratuities, favors, or anything of significant monetary value from potential Head Start/EHS families.
- vii. I will not complete eligibility for the following relatives: Husband, Father, Mother, Brother, Sister, Son, Daughter, Father-in-law, Mother-in-law, Sister-in-law, Brother-in-law, Step-parents, Step-parents in-law.

I understand that Head Start/Early Head Start services are paid for with federal funds and that intentionally providing misleading, inaccurate or untruthful information of a material nature could have serious legal consequences.

In the event that the Standards of Conduct are violated, I can be subjected to disciplinary actions up to and including termination of employment/contract.

## Confidentiality

The Easterseals Early Learning Services programs will ensure confidentiality and privacy regarding services, records, and discussions of or about any person or child served by the program. Part of protecting the confidentiality of children and families requires that staff only communicate with parents and/or legal guardians. Sharing personal information with any third party requires the express written permission of the parent and/or guardian with a few exceptions. We share information with consultants who have a legitimate need for the information to provide services to the child or family. For example, we may have a Social Emotional Specialist that is going to provide services to the family. We will also share information with the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services in situations where we suspect child abuse or neglect, in which case we are mandated reporters. We also may share personally identifying information to consultants or regulatory representatives as part of a self-assessment or program audit. We may also share confidential information if it is included as part of a court order request.

### **You have rights under our confidentiality policy.**

- You have the right to inspect your child's records. We will make the records available no more than 45 days after you request them.
- If you believe your child's record contains errors, you have the right to request that we correct the information.
- If we do not correct the record to your satisfaction, you have the right to request a hearing and we will schedule a hearing with an impartial arbiter.
- You have the right to a copy of your child's record.
- Finally, you have the right to inspect written agreements that we have with third parties.

## Concern Procedure

We hope that no family enrolled in Easterseals Early Learning Services or community member ever has a reason to be unhappy with our services, but we recognize that there may come a time when someone feels the need to address a concern.

It is important that questions, concerns, ideas and problems be dealt with in a positive manner. We hope that parents and community members feel comfortable expressing their concerns directly to the individual involved. Most problems can be resolved with direct, positive, problem-solving focused communication. Every attempt should be made to handle the situation directly. After communications have been attempted with the person involved, if the situation is still unresolved, the concern should be put in writing.

The written concern will be submitted online using this link: [Concern Form](#) (a paper version will be provided upon request). The concern will be reviewed by Easterseals Early Learning Services. The parent may be contacted to provide additional clarifying information. If the issue can be resolved through this conversation, the parent will be provided a written summary of the conversation within 10 business days of the conversation.

(Concern Policy Continued on next page)

Most concerns that are not resolved will be passed on to the site team where those needed to resolve the issue will be involved.

If the concern involves an Easterseals employee, the concern may be passed on to that person's immediate supervisor. The supervisor may contact the parent and attempt to resolve the concern between the parent and the staff person involved.

A written response will be prepared by Easterseals Early Learning staff outlining action taken and given to Parent and/or Parent Committee Chairperson within ten (10) working days of the meeting or conversation.

If the Parent/Community member(s) and/or Parent Center Committee is not satisfied with the written response, the Parent/Community member(s) may request a joint meeting of the Policy Council for final resolution of the concern/problem through a written request to the Policy Council/Committee Chairperson. The chief operating officer of Easterseals will also be notified of the situation. A meeting will be scheduled to address the issue within 30 days of receiving the request. The action recommended by the Policy Council/Committee as a result of the meeting will be reported to the Board of Directors.

# Pedestrian Safety

Pedestrian safety education must be provided to children and parents within the first 30 days of the program year.

In addition to emergency evacuation procedures, it is critical for children to learn and practice safety procedures on:

- safe riding practices
- boarding and leaving a vehicle
- crossing the street
- danger zones around a vehicle

Helping parents to reinforce safety procedures with their children can be introduced during a parent training. They can also practice vehicle safety as the family uses public transportation or their own vehicle. Parents are important as the child learns to avoid danger in their environment.

## Pedestrian Safety: Do's and Don'ts

Teach your children:

1. Do not cross the street alone if you're younger than 10 years old.
2. Do stop at the curb before crossing the street.
3. Don't run, across the street, walk.
4. Do cross at corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks.
5. Hold an adult's hand when crossing the street. Do look left, right, and left again before crossing.
6. Do walk facing traffic.
7. Do not play in driveway, streets, parking lots or unfenced yards by the street.
8. Wear white clothing or reflector when walking at night
9. Only cross in front of a school bus when the driver says it is safe. Do not cross behind the bus or where the driver can't see you.
10. If a toy or pet goes out into the street, ask an adult for help getting it back.



For more safety information visit [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org)

## Center Based Supplement for the Easterseals Early Learning Services Parent Handbook

Easterseals and partnership sites work together to deliver comprehensive, quality services. Our collaboration model means that different services are brought together to make a greater impact on children and families. The Early Learning Teams and their services are listed below.

### Our Partner Centers

Our partner centers bring together Child Care, Head Start, Preschool for All, Early Head Start, and Prevention Initiative services to provide your child the highest quality services possible. Without these blended services, the quality would be less. **We encourage all parents to apply for and continue enrollment for all funding sources, including Child Care Assistance (also called childcare subsidy).**

### Center Based Services

In our centers Head Start (7 hours), Early Head Start (7 hours), and Prevention Initiative (2.5 hours) services are provided year-round. There are some days off throughout the year for holidays, professional development and other days decided by the program or the partner centers. In suburban centers, Preschool for All services are 2.5 hours per day for about 10 months of the year (see PFA Supplement for more details).



Each site designates a daily schedule identifying which are the HS/EHS and PFA/PI hours. During those hours, partner centers are providing the services outlined in the Parent Handbook and supplements for each program, including enhanced ratios, teacher qualifications, nutrition services, and safety procedures. Many families need additional care at the center beyond these hours and make arrangements directly with the center. Centers maintain services based on Illinois licensing standards during any additional childcare hours. If a HS/EHS/PI/PFA parent loses their childcare eligibility (for instance, due to loss of employment), the child remains enrolled in HS/EHS/PFA/PI. The child may still attend the HS/EHS/PFA/PI hours at the center, but parents must pick up their child at the end of those hours. The Family Health Advocate will help the parent with their goal of finding new employment, entering a job training program, or enrolling in school to become childcare eligible again.

### Family and Health/Nutrition Team

This team works with sites and families to promote parent and family engagement. Family Health Advocates (FHA) meet with each family at the beginning of enrollment to complete the family strengths and needs assessment and to set goals. The FHA and family work together to accomplish these goals through referrals. The Family Assessment and goals will be reviewed regularly throughout enrollment.

**Families also have opportunities to take leadership roles at the center.** They can attend Parent Committee meetings to learn what is happening at the center. They can also run for leadership roles. Parents elect officers to help run the meetings. We have chairpersons, vice-chairpersons and secretaries for each center's parent committee. Parent Committees also elect a representative from Head Start and from Early Head Start to the program wide Policy Council.

## Family & Community Engagement & Partnership

- Family Health Advocates (FHAs) begin to build a relationship of and trust from the first contact with each family
- Staff and parents review a family strengths and needs assessment about the family's goals. (We call this a Family Partnership Agreement.)
- Baby TALK parent curriculum is research-based and designed for parents of children ages 0-5. It is individualized to meet parents' interests. We supplement this parent curriculum with a video based curriculum called Ready Rosie.
  - FHAs and parents will meet at least twice in a year at the family's home, using the Baby TALK curriculum to talk about parenting issues of interest to the parent and do activities planned specifically for your child.
- Staff provide appropriate referrals and resources (housing, job training, free activities, workshops, behavioral health counseling) for each unique family
- We recruit for new children and families all year and parents can help by referring friends and family
- Family Health Advocates work with the parents and centers to offer family engagement activities (workshops, parent socials, parent meetings and other community activities)
- Staff collaborate with schools and families on transition to kindergarten activities



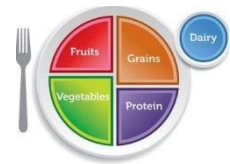
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and talk

## Health

- Family Health Advocates track and support families in obtaining physicals, dentals, immunizations, and all health screenings according to the state of Illinois EPSDT schedule
- Children's height and weight will be measured twice a year
- Reinforce family style meal services and dental hygiene
- Staff will work with families on nutrition and alternate food plans
- Develop cooperative relationships with local health professionals

## Nutrition Services

- Registered/licensed nutritionist reviews site menus to ensure nutritious foods are offered to Head Start/Early Head Start children
- Family Health Advocate connects parents with the nutritionist when they have questions about nutrition services
- Nutritionist offers alternate food plans to children who need a special diet, and assists any child with nutritional needs
- A nutrition action plan is offered to children with weight issues
- Nutrition workshops are provided for staff and parents
- Breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack or supper are provided daily
- Breastfeeding is supported and encouraged
- Easterseals HS/EHS sites use funds from the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP), a program of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), as the primary source of payment for meals for all ages of EHS and HS children.



## Education, Inclusion, and Social Emotional Support Team

This team partners with teachers, parents/guardians, and directors to ensure that classrooms are safe, nurturing, and engaging learning environments for children. The team's role is to coach and mentor teachers in the classroom through relationship building, modeling, offering recommendations and ideas and providing professional development. The Education/Inclusion team also plays a vital role in ensuring all children, including children with diagnosed disabilities, are fully included in program activities. This is implemented through individualization, referrals to outside resources, trainings, and transition planning with teachers and parents.



### Defining School Readiness

- Head Start defines its approach to School Readiness as meaning that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children.
- Head Start views school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life.
- Programs must establish school readiness goals that are appropriate for the ages and development of enrolled children.
- Measuring progress toward school readiness goals helps programs individualize for each child and ensure that children know and can do what is needed to be ready for kindergarten.
- Head Start respects parents as their children's primary nurturers, teachers, and advocates. Programs are required to consult with parents in establishing school readiness goals
- As children transition to kindergarten, Head Start programs and schools work together to promote school readiness and engage families.

### Education

- All classrooms use the Creative Curriculum, which is research-based and aligned with state early learning standards
- Assessments are ongoing and utilize observations, pictures, videos, audio recordings, and examples of children's work to demonstrate children's competencies in a variety of learning domains determined essential for school readiness
- After each of three checkpoints a year, the results are analyzed and used to guide planning, individualization, and professional development.
- In center-based there are two home visits and two parent-teacher conferences per year.

## Inclusion

- All children receive regular developmental screenings to look at overall development, social-emotional development, and hearing/vision and to determine if further evaluation is needed
- If there are any concerns identified, children are referred to the appropriate agencies and supported through the evaluation process
- Children with pre-diagnosed disabilities are included in the classroom along with typically developing peers.
- At least 10% of enrollment will be children with disabilities

## Social Emotional Support

- A qualified social emotional specialist/consultant is assigned to each site.
- The specialist/consultant performs general classroom observations and provides training and guidance to staff on supporting children's social and emotional development.
- The specialist/consultant also conducts individual observations of children with parent consent and offers suggestions on strategies for working with the child in the classroom and at home.
- Each family has access to 3 crisis-counseling sessions and can be referred for additional outside services when needed.

## Attendance

- **We offer full year services for both Head Start and Early Head Start!** The center staff will tell you about any planned breaks so that you can prepare.
- Attendance is very important to your child's success in Early Learning as well as future success in school. We ask that you bring your child every day that school is open unless he or she is sick. Please dress them appropriately for the weather so they are prepared for cold or inclement weather as children will go outside most days.
- Missing only two days per month may place your child at less than 90% attendance and at risk of chronic absence. After 60 days in the program, staff will review each child's attendance to see if the child is at risk of chronic absence. We will develop a plan to work with those parents to improve the child's attendance.
- **If your child must be absent, let us know ahead of time or call the morning of the absence.** If we don't hear from you, we will call you. We must check in with the parent/guardian or caregiver of a child who is absent within 1 hour of the child's expected arrival time to check on the child's wellbeing.
- **If your child must be absent for an extended time, parents must request in writing that we continue the child's enrollment.** The request must state the date that absence will begin, the reason for absence, and when the child will be back. Requests for over two weeks must be approved by both the center and Easterseals. We will carefully consider each request.
- Children who are out for two weeks (10 school days) or more without prior approval may have the spot considered vacant, so they would need to reapply upon return. This means that eligibility will need to be determined again and the child might end up on the waitlist.
- We are responsible for making sure that Head Start services are provided to our funded enrollment every month. **We support parents in making attendance in school a family priority.**

## Toileting Procedures

### Toilet Training Signs of Readiness

The decision on when to begin toilet training should be based on the child's developmental readiness. Readiness cues may include the following:

- Stays dry for at least 2 hours at a time, or after naps.
- Recognizes that s/he is urinating or having a bowel movement.
- Is developing physical skills that are critical to potty training—the ability to walk, to pull pants up and down, and to get onto/off the potty (with some help).
- Copies a parent's toileting behavior.
- Can follow simple instructions.
- Expresses interest in using the potty.

Parents are asked to let their child's teacher know when they begin seeing these readiness cues at home and are thinking of beginning toilet training at home. Likewise, the teacher will let the parent know when the child begins showing readiness cues at school. The teacher and parent can then develop a plan to support the child with toilet training at both home and school.

### 0-3 Program – Assistance Provided Regularly to All Children as Needed

Toilet training is a major learning experience for young children. Teachers will approach toilet training within the context of supporting the child's self-esteem and independence. Toilet training involves discussing, undressing, going, wiping, dressing, flushing, and hand washing, and teachers will reinforce the child's success at each step. The child will be encouraged to complete all of the steps independently to the extent possible, but the teacher will provide hands-on assistance as needed with managing clothing and wiping.

### Preschool (3-5) Program – Assistance Provided Regularly Only with Individual Toileting Plan

In preschool, there is additional emphasis on independence in completing self-help tasks. The general expectation is that children will be able to take care of most aspects of routine daily toileting on their own, including wiping themselves with toilet paper. Occasionally children may need assistance with their clothing when performing higher level fine motor tasks such as buttoning, buckling, etc. Teachers will provide verbal prompting as needed and hands-on assistance for dressing tasks as needed. Because children's fine motor and self-help skills are still developing, it is to be expected that children may not do a perfect job of cleaning themselves. Parents should continue to work with their child at home on these skills.

If a preschool child has a toileting accident, the teacher will call an additional staff person to the classroom to monitor and will physically assist the child as needed in cleaning up with wet wipes and changing clothes.

Different children have different needs. If a preschool child requires hands-on assistance from an adult to complete routine daily toileting tasks, an individual toileting plan will be developed. The plan will be written, will specify the tasks to be completed by the child and by the teacher, and will be signed and dated by the parent, teacher, family and health advocate, and site director. The plan will be reviewed and updated by the group at least every six months and more often if needed.

## USDA (CACFP)

All our centers partner with the USDA to provide nutritious meals. The USDA establishes minimum serving sizes to meet the nutrition needs of children at each age. Our Head Start and Early Head Start Standards require that at least half of a child's nutrition needs are met while at the center.

### Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

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To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

## **Preschool For All and Prevention Initiative Supplement for the Easterseals Early Learning Services Parent Handbook**

**Easterseals provides Preschool For All (PFA) services** through a grant from Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). We provide those services through partnerships with local, private childcare partners to children ages 3 to 5 and their families.

### **Preschool for All Services include:**

- Additional teaching staff for 2 ½ hours each day, either in the morning or afternoon
- Enhanced educational activities
- Higher qualifications for the PFA teacher
- A Lending library at each center that has PFA (ask staff at the center for information on how to borrow items from the lending library)
- Alignment with the Illinois Early Learning Standards

Easterseals Early Learning Services PFA Teachers work together with partner site staff to create a learning environment to support children's development. Through the implementation of Creative Curriculum, Teaching Strategies Gold and alignment of the Illinois Early Learning Standards, teachers provide daily activities to support individual needs of children.

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**Easterseals provides Center Based Prevention Initiative (PI) services** through a grant from Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). We provide those services through partnerships with local, private childcare partners to children under age 3 and their families.

### **Prevention Initiative Services include:**

- Additional funding to the center to provide quality improvements
- Enhanced staffing requirements, including having an Infant Toddler Specialist on site
- Enhanced Parent Engagement, including:
  - A lending library at each center that has PI (ask staff at the center for information on how to borrow items from the lending library)
  - Monthly Group Parent and Child activities that support their bond and the child's development
  - Individualized Family Encounters that
    - are scheduled with you based on your needs,
    - support the relationship between you and your child,
    - intentionally support the development of each child,
    - provide support to you in your role as the primary educator of your child,
    - are aligned to the Illinois Early Learning Guidelines,
    - would ideally happen in the convenience of your home, but can occur in a mutually agreed on location
    - would happen at least 2 times each year and more frequently if requested by you
- Requirements for using research-based tools and curricula
- Alignment with Illinois Early Learning Guidelines