

EARLY HEAD START TIP SHEET

No. 26

EHS Socialization Environments, May 2006

How do you create an effective environment for infant/toddler socializations in an Early Head Start Home-Based program?

NOTE: This tip sheet will discuss effective environments for socializations in the Early Head Start home-based program option. It is intended to expand on specific areas addressed in the **ACF Information Memorandum: Child development services during home visits and socializations in the Early Head Start home-based program option (2000)**. Please refer to that document for regulatory guidance on this topic.

Response:

The environment for group socializations is a key ingredient in the success of socialization experiences. Creating an effective environment requires a clear understanding of the goals of socializations for infants and toddlers. The purpose of socialization experiences for infants and toddlers is to support child development by strengthening the parent-child relationship. This is in contrast to socializations for preschoolers where the goals are to support and develop peer group socializations.

Relationships form the foundation through which healthy social and emotional development happens for young children. When an infant or toddler develops a strong, supportive and healthy relationship with her parent through the socialization process, she learns to have trusting relationships with peers and other adults as she grows into a preschooler. As a preschooler, she will be able to develop positive relationships with other peers and adults as the result of the early positive parent-child relationship. Although the focus of the relationships are different, socialization promotes relationship-building at all developmental levels.

Socialization distinctions for infants and toddlers

Not only are there differences in the focus of relationships in Early Head Start (EHS) socialization experiences, there are also important distinctions within the infant/toddler developmental spectrum.

- **Very Young Infants.** Socializations for very young infants (approximately birth to 9 months) are slightly different from mobile infants and toddlers. Very young infants require safe, warm environments in which they can eat and be nurtured by their parents. EHS programs can consider having comfortable adult-sized chairs available in quiet areas for this purpose. For parents who choose to put sleeping infants down, clean and firm surfaces can be made available that are located away from mobile infants and toddlers.
- **Mobile Infants.** While mobile infants (approximately 9-18 months) are ready to explore and be more adventurous, socialization experiences can continue to encourage development of the parent-child relationship. EHS programs can plan activities that will include parents and, simultaneously allow them to observe their infants developing a wide range of emerging abilities. For example, some parents of mobile infants might be transitioning their child from the bottle to a cup. EHS staff can plan an eating/drinking activity that will allow parents to work with their infants, observe their progress with the developing skill, and learn from other parents.

- **Toddlers.** Toddlers' (approximately 19-36 months) socialization experiences may begin to resemble preschool experiences based on the range of activities planned. They are interested in books, art, and other novel toys and activities. However, most toddlers will spend the majority of their time playing alone or with adults, or engage in parallel play with peers. They might prefer to observe group activities rather than participate in the group process. Many toddlers are developing independence and want to be able to complete activities and tasks alone and without the help of parents or other peers.

Elements to create meaningful socialization experiences

Various elements – such as planning and documenting, parent involvement, physical environment, and approach to curriculum – work together to create meaningful socialization experiences in the EHS home-based services option. These elements are detailed below.

Planning and Documenting:

- The minimum number of 32 home visits and 16 socialization experiences, as stated in the federal regulations **45 CFR 1306.33**, is based on a part-year Head Start program. Because Early Head Start is a full year program, the yearly number of home visits and socializations need to be proportionately increased to cover the full year implementation of EHS.
- Group socializations offer unique opportunities for parents and young children to build on goals and experiences of home visits; and the benefits are two-fold. Added time is provided for infants, toddlers and their parents to strengthen their relationships, and parents have the opportunity to interact with other adults. Parents receive feedback from EHS staff, and other community-based professionals about their young child's strengths, needs and interests. They interact with and sometimes learn from other parents, and are able to observe their infants or toddlers responding to other children. Young children, in turn, enjoy their parent's focused attention. Socializations also provide an opportunity for parents to observe their children in a different setting, with different materials and experiences. Parents gain greater depth of understanding of their young children when seen in a group setting.
- Parents have a role in planning socializations. The Family Partnership Agreement includes specific roles of parents in socializations and home visits [**45 CFR 1304.40(a)(2)**]. It is helpful to gather information from parents about topics that are meaningful and meeting times and places that are convenient. These factors will become barriers to family participation if not carefully considered by program staff.
- Home visitors have a central role in both the planning and implementing of the socialization experience. It is through the relationship between the home visitor and family that effective home visits and socializations take place. Careful planning on the part of the home visitor and the parent ensures that the goals of socializations are linked to the goals of home visits, so that family goals are built upon and are meaningful for parents and their young children. If socializations are led by another staff person, the home visitor is still present to provide support to the family during the socialization experience.
- Socializations are a wonderful opportunity to observe children and to identify their strengths, growth, and needs. Careful documentation of these observations aid in the planning process and in developing curricular goals. Documentation can include written notes, videotape, or photographs.

Parent Involvement:

- Planning the socializations is one important aspect of parent involvement, and how parents participate in the experience is another. Parents can have a role facilitating socialization experiences, for example, if they have a particular interest or skill to share with the group.
- Interacting and networking with other parents is another element of successful involvement in socializations. Parents can gain greater insight into their own child, support other parents, and develop a sense of community as they develop relationships with other families and community members.
- Home visitors and other staff members can engage parents by modeling how to observe their child's interactions and explorations and expand those learning opportunities.

Environments for Socializations:

- Everything in the environment has the potential for learning as infants and toddlers use all of their senses to explore the sights, sounds, tastes, and textures of everything with which they come into contact. Carefully selected materials and planned experiences provide stimulation in all areas of development – motor, language, cognitive, and social – to create high quality socialization experiences.
- Setting up the environment requires that staff members consider a number of important elements:
 - Is the space easy to arrange or rearrange as needed? Are furnishings easy to move to create smaller learning areas depending on the size of the group and the ages of the children? Mobile infants and toddlers need a large motor area where they can move freely.
 - Does the space invite parents to interact with their children? Large pillows, low risers, or comfortable chairs that allow parents to be on or near the ground help facilitate parent-child interaction.
 - If a meal is being provided, is the food/snack appropriate for children and adults? For example, is there infant formula and baby food available for infants? Do the snacks promote healthy eating habits for children and adults? Are there opportunities to model and practice healthy habits such as hand washing and tooth brushing?
 - Is the environment welcoming for parents and other adult caregivers who may attend with parents (e.g., grandparents)? Consider whether it would be beneficial to provide some space and independent activities for older siblings so that parents are free to attend to their infant or toddler.
 - Providing duplicates of toys helps alleviate some of the problems that can arise over competition for toys. Infants and toddlers are not developmentally ready to “share” or take turns with the level of compliance expected of an older child.

Curriculum:

- A developmentally appropriate curriculum for infants and toddlers is based on experiences rather than activities. These experiences focus on the way children relate to materials, and to adults and one another instead of directing how they manipulate something or have an end product, such as something they “make.” The environment is important because it can either support and facilitate this kind of exploration, or can inhibit it, severely limiting the learning potential that is offered.

- Socializations are individualized to address the developmental level of each participating child and the goals, needs, and resources of each family. Goals and outcomes for each child will change as the child grows and development progresses. Balancing the needs of participating children and families is linked to thoughtful planning, careful observation, and regular documentation.
- When providing services to children with disabilities, it is important that socialization experiences include and build on the supports and strategies outlined in the child's Individualized Family Services Plan. It is equally important that staff work with the child's early intervention provider on an ongoing basis to make sure that socialization activities are appropriate to the child's developing skills.
- The needs of children at different developmental levels (very young infants, mobile infants and toddlers) vary, and are taken into consideration when planning for socializations. Toddlers, for example, may be able to participate in an experience for longer periods of time than very young infants who may tire faster. The duration of the socialization experience is based on knowledge of these particular needs.
- Socializations offer numerous "teachable moments" that can create relevant, but unplanned, learning opportunities. These learning experiences often have the greatest impact because they are connected to authentic experiences. A responsive curriculum values these learning opportunities.

Questions to Consider for Planning and Programming:

- How are socializations linked to the home visits?
- How are home visitors and parents involved in planning socializations?
- What are the roles of staff and parents during socializations?
- Is the environment safe, clean, and conveniently located?
- How is the environment arranged to facilitate parent-child interactions?
- What accommodations are available for older siblings?
- Are group sizes conducive to quality interactions between parents, children, and staff members?
- How are socializations documented? How does the documentation help plan socializations and determine individual goals or progress?
- Is there consultation with early intervention providers for children with disabilities?
- How do curricular experiences support children's development and learning? How are socializations individualized?

Performance Standards, Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations:

- 1306.33(a)(1)-(2) Grantees implementing a home-based option must:
 - (1) Provide one home visit per week per family (a minimum of 32 home visits per year) lasting for a minimum of 1 and ½ hours each;
 - (2) Provide, at a minimum, two group socialization activities per month for each child (a minimum of 16 group socialization activities each year).
- 1304.53(a)(1) Grantee and delegate agencies must provide a physical environment and facilities conducive to learning and reflective of the different stages of development of each child.

- 1304.53(a)(2) Grantee and delegate agencies must provide appropriate space for the conduct of all program activities (see 45 CFR 1308.4 for specific access requirements for children with disabilities).
- 1304.53(a)(3) The center space provided by grantee and delegate agencies must be organized into functional areas that can be recognized by the children and that allow for individual activities and social interactions.
- 1304.21(b)(1)(i)-(iii) Grantee and delegate agencies' program of service for infant and toddlers must encourage (see 45 CFR 1304.(a)(5) for a definition of curriculum):
 - (i) The development of secure relationships in out-of-home care settings for infants and toddlers by having a limited number of consistent teachers over an extended period of time. Teachers must demonstrate an understanding of the child's family culture and, whenever possible, speak the child's language (see 45 CFR 1304.52(g)(2));
 - (ii) Trust and emotional security so that each child can explore the environment according to his or her developmental level; and
 - (iii) Opportunities for each child to explore a variety of sensory and motor experiences with support and stimulation from teachers and family members.
- 1304.21(b)(2)(i)-(ii) Grantee and delegate agencies must support the social and emotional development of infants and toddlers by promoting an environment that:
 - (i) Encourages the development of self-awareness, autonomy, and self-expression; and
 - (ii) Supports the emerging communication skills of infants and toddlers by providing daily opportunities for each child to interact with others and to express himself or herself freely.
- 1304.21(b)(3)(i)-(ii) Grantee and delegate agencies must promote the physical development of infants and toddlers by:
 - (i) Supporting the development of the physical skills of infants and toddlers including gross motor skills, such as grasping, pulling, pushing, crawling, walking, and climbing; and
 - (ii) Creating opportunities for fine motor development that encourage the control and coordination of small, specialized motions, using the eyes, mouth, hands, and feet.

Resources:

Head Start Bulletin, 67: Curriculum in Head Start. DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. (March 2000).

Head Start Bulletin, 69: Early Head Start. DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. (October 2000).

Information Memorandum, ACYF-IM-00-02: Child Development Services during Home Visits and Socializations in the Early Head Start Home-Based Program Option. DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. 2000.

Early Head Start National Resource Center (EHS NRC). **Early Head Start Program Strategies: Socializations for Infants and Toddlers in the Early Head Start Home-Based Program Option.** DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. 2001.

EHS NRC. **Home Visitor's Handbook for the Head Start Home-Based Program Option.** DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. 2004.

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This Tip Sheet is not a regulatory document. Its intent is to provide a basis for dialogue, clarification, and problem solving among Office of Head Start, Regional Offices, TA consultants, and grantees. If you need further clarification on Head Start Policies and regulations, please contact your Regional Program Specialist.