

ACF Administration for Children and Families	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	
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TO: All Head Start and Early Head Start Agencies and Delegate Agencies

SUBJECT: Head Start and Early Head Start Eligibility for Children in Kinship Care

INFORMATION:

The Office of Head Start (OHS) has received questions from grantees who want to enroll children living in kinship care and are concerned about the eligibility of these children. Formal or informal kinship care, for the purposes of this IM, broadly refers to children who are living with relatives or caregivers other than their parents. In most cases, these children are eligible for Head Start services according to the Head Start Act and Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) and programs can enroll them. OHS encourages grantees to include children in kinship care in their enrollment and selection process.

The following descriptions provide grantees with information about ways children in kinship care can be eligible for Head Start.

Public Assistance

- Relative caregivers are often eligible for public assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). If the caregiver receives or is eligible to receive public assistance, a child in their care is eligible for Head Start because they meet the definition of a family under HSPPS [45 CFR §1305.2](#).
- If the child living with relatives receives a "child-only" TANF grant, then the child receives public assistance. A child who receives or is eligible to receive public assistance is eligible for Head Start.
- For information about the TANF programs in your state, visit: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/help>

Foster Care

- Each state has jurisdiction of its child welfare system. OHS considers a child in foster care if the child is placed in a setting away from parents or guardians by the child welfare system and the state agency has placement and care responsibility ([45 CFR §1305.2](#)). A child is in foster care in accordance with this definition regardless of whether the foster care facility is licensed and payments are made by the state or local agency for the care of the child.
- If the child welfare agency has placed the child away from parents or guardians and in the care of relatives, the child is considered to be in foster care under the HSPPS. A child in foster care is eligible for Head Start.
- For additional resources for kinship caregivers and the child welfare system, visit: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-kinshi/>

Homeless

- Head Start follows the definition of homeless child in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a(2)). If a child is living with non-parent relatives due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason, the child may meet this definition of a homeless child. A child experiencing homelessness is eligible for Head Start.

- Some examples of circumstances leading a child to kinship care include economic hardship, substance misuse, or incarceration. If the child is living with non-parent relatives for these or similar reasons, the child may be considered homeless and then would be eligible for Head Start.
- For additional resources for early care and education and homeless children, visit: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/eecdf/interagency-projects/ece-services-for-homeless-children>

If you have any questions regarding eligibility, please contact your Regional Office. Thank you for all you do to serve the most vulnerable children and families.

/ Dr. Deborah Bergeron /

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