

HEAD START TIP SHEET



When children are with the same teachers over time, they get the attention and affection they need to have meaningful relationships and learn about themselves. Children thrive in these close relationships developed through continuity of care. Primary caregiving—when one primary teacher cares for a child or small group of children—is a big part of continuity of care. It helps children develop close relationships with their teachers, peers, and families.

HOW DOES CONTINUITY OF CARE HELP CHILDREN?

- ◆ Nurturing, responsive, and effective interactions help children learn.
- ◆ Children’s routines are steady—allowing them to predict daily experiences.
- ◆ Young children have more time to learn that people remain in their lives in caring, meaningful ways—that they can rely on and safely love other people.
- ◆ It offers stability for young children whose families experience challenges such as unstable housing, multiple moves, employment issues, or other concerns.
- ◆ Families have opportunities for deeper relationships with teachers based on open, two-way lines of communication.

HOW DOES CONTINUITY OF CARE HELP TEACHERS?

- ◆ They get to know the children, their cues, and their personal histories.
- ◆ They feel more confident working with different age groups.
- ◆ They learn about families’ cultures and develop deeper relationships with families through ongoing, two-way communication.
- ◆ It provides a sense of stability that means teachers don’t need to worry about learning needs and routines of new children or seeing ones they are attached to “graduate” from their group.

WHAT IS CONTINUITY OF CARE?

Continuity of care means Head Start or Early Head Start services provided to children in a manner that promotes primary caregiving and minimizes the number of transitions in teachers and teacher assistants that children experience over the course of the day, week, program year, and to the extent possible, during the course of their participation from birth to age three in Early Head Start and in Head Start (§1305.2 Terms)

HOW CAN PROGRAMS IMPLEMENT CONTINUITY OF CARE SYSTEMS?

Here are three ways that programs can create continuity of care systems. Programs choose a system based on space, materials and resources, staff expertise, and parent and community needs:

1

GROUP MIXED-AGE INFANTS AND TODDLERS.

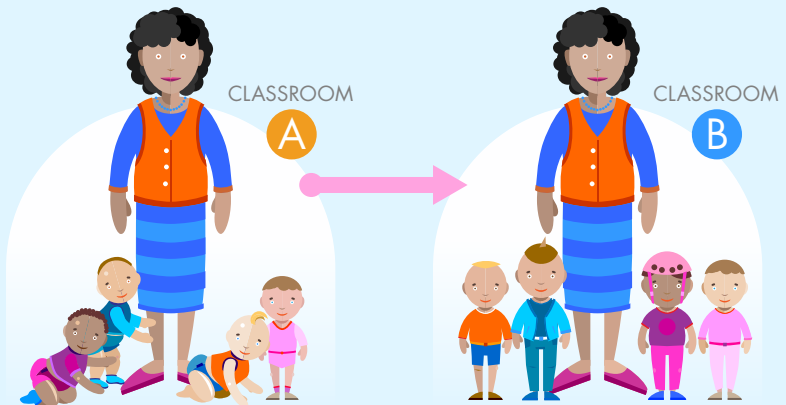
Have the same primary caregivers work with classes of mixed-age infants and toddlers. The environment should include equipment and materials based on children's ages, interests, needs, and skills. As children age out of the group and move to preschool, add newly enrolled infants or toddlers. The same teachers remain in the classroom.



2

KEEP CLOSE-AGE CHILDREN WITH THE SAME TEACHERS (LOOPING).

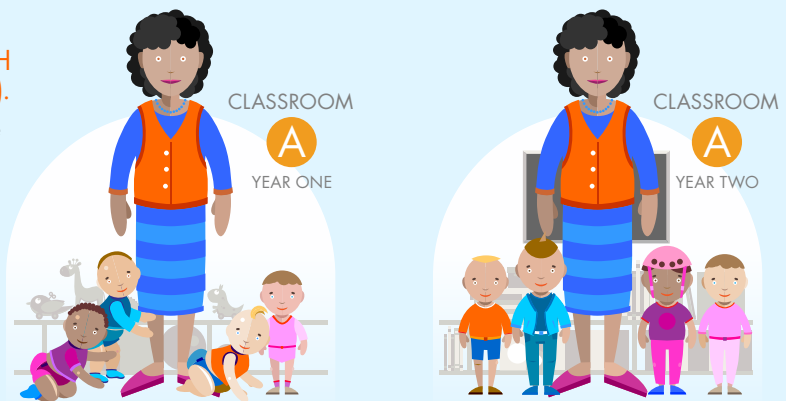
As children grow older, move the group together with the teachers to a more age-appropriate space. In this arrangement, teachers work with different age groups over several years.



3

CLOSE-AGE CHILDREN REMAIN WITH THE SAME TEACHERS (SAME ROOM).

As the children grow older, they stay in the same room with their teachers. The teachers adjust the environment as children's abilities and interests change.



CLICK ON THE LINKS TO CONTINUITY OF CARE IN THE HSPPS:

1302.20 Determining program structure. (a)(2) –

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-20-determining-program-structure>

1302.21 Center-based option. (b)(1) and (b)(2) –

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/policy/45-cfr-chap-xiii/1302-21-center-based-option>

RESOURCES:

Lally, J. Ronald, and Sheila M. Signer. “Introduction to Continuity.” Sacramento, CA: WestEd, The Program for Infant Toddler Care, n.d. Accessed January 17, 2018.

<http://www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/communitydevelopment/funding/documents/AreaVI/Resources/ChildCare/IntroContinuity.pdf>.

WestEd. “Early Caregiver-Child Relationships Build the Foundation for Lifelong Learning.” R&D Alert Online (January 17, 2017). https://www.wested.org/rd_alert_online/infant-toddler-care-relationships-lifelong-learning/.

“Primary Caregiving and Continuity of Care.” February 8, 2010. Excerpted from Theilheimer, Rachel. “Molding to the Children: Primary Caregiving and Continuity of Care.” *Zero to Three* 26, no. 3 (2006).

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/85-primary-caregiving-and-continuity-of-care>.

This document was developed with funds from Grant #90HC0012-01-00 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start and Office of Child Care, by the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.