



Head Start Program Performance Standards with Mental Health and Social and Emotional Focus

Head Start and Early Head Start programs support the mental health of children, families, and staff every day. Early childhood mental health is the same as social and emotional well-being. It is a child's developing capacity to express and regulate emotions, form trusting relationships, explore, and learn—all in the cultural context of family and community. The mental health of children and the adults that care for them is essential for school readiness. This list represents a variety of the Head Start Program Performance Standards that include some aspect of mental health.

Highlights of the Program Performance Standards with a Mental Health and Social and Emotional Focus include:

- a strong focus on implementing a program wide culture of wellness that **promotes mental health and social and emotional well-being** of children, families and staff
- **requirements for programs to use mental health consultants** to support children's mental health and social and emotional well-being
- the establishment of collaborative partnerships with child and adult mental health professionals; and
- **emphasis on the prohibition of suspension and expulsion for challenging behaviors**

The new Head Start Program Performance Standards are effective as of November 7, 2016, which is 60 days after their publication.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL- BEING

(a) A program must provide high-quality health, oral health, mental health, and nutrition services that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and that will support each child's growth and school readiness.

Child Mental Health and Social and Emotional Well-Being

1302.45

(a) *Wellness promotion.* To support a **program wide culture that promotes children's mental health, social and emotional well-being**, and overall health, a program must:

- (1) Provide supports for effective classroom management and positive learning environments; supportive teacher practices; and, strategies for supporting children with **challenging behaviors and other social, emotional, and mental health concerns**;
- (2) **Secure mental health consultation services** on a schedule of sufficient and consistent frequency to ensure a mental health consultant is available to partner with staff and families in a timely and effective manner;
- (3) Obtain parental consent for mental health consultation services at enrollment; and,
- (4) Build community partnerships to facilitate access to additional mental health resources and services, as needed.

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(a) Mental health consultants. A program must ensure mental health consultants assist:

(1) The program to **implement strategies to identify and support children with mental health and social and emotional concerns;**

(2) Teachers, including family child care providers, to improve **classroom management and teacher practices through strategies that include using classroom observations and consultations to address teacher and individual child needs** and creating physical and cultural environments that promote positive mental health and social and emotional functioning;

(3) **Other staff, including home visitors, to meet children’s mental health and social and emotional needs through strategies that include observation and consultation;**

(4) **Staff to address prevalent child mental health concerns, including internalizing problems such as appearing withdrawn and externalizing problems such as challenging behaviors; and,**

(5) In helping both **parents and staff to understand mental health and access mental health interventions**, if needed.

(6) In the implementation of the policies to limit suspension and prohibit expulsion as described in §1302.17.

Family Support Services for Health, Nutrition, And Mental Health

1302.46

(a) *Parent collaboration.* Programs must collaborate with parents to promote children’s health and well-being by providing medical, oral, nutrition and **mental health** education support services that are understandable to individuals, including individuals with low health literacy.

(b) *Opportunities.* (1) Such collaboration must include opportunities for parents to:

... (iii) Learn about healthy pregnancy and postpartum care, as appropriate, including breastfeeding support and treatment options **for parental mental health or substance use problems, including perinatal depression;**

(iv) Discuss with staff and identify issues related to **child mental health and social and emotional well-being**, including observations and any concerns about their **child’s mental health**, typical and atypical behavior and development, and how to appropriately respond to their child and promote their **child’s social and emotional development;** and,

(2) A program must provide ongoing support to assist parents’ navigation through health systems to meet the general health and specifically identified needs of their children and must assist parents:

(i) In understanding how to access health insurance for themselves and their families, including information about private and public health insurance and designated enrollment periods;

(ii) In understanding the results of diagnostic and treatment procedures as well as plans for ongoing care; and,

(iii) In familiarizing their children with services they will receive while enrolled in the program and to enroll and participate in a system of ongoing family health care.

SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION

Suspension And Expulsion

1302.17

(a) Limitations on suspension. (1) A program must prohibit or severely limit the use of suspension due to a child’s behavior. Such suspensions may only be temporary in nature.

(2) A temporary suspension must be used only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a serious safety threat that cannot be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable modifications.

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(3) Before a program determines whether a temporary suspension is necessary, a program must engage with a **mental health consultant**, collaborate with the parents, and utilize appropriate community resources – such as behavior coaches, psychologists, other appropriate specialists, or other resources – as needed, to determine no other reasonable option is appropriate.

(4) If a temporary suspension is deemed necessary, a program must help the child return to full participation in all program activities as quickly as possible while ensuring child safety by:

(i) Continuing to engage with the **parents and a mental health consultant**, and continuing to utilize appropriate community resources;

(ii) **Developing a written plan** to document the action and supports needed;

(iii) Providing services that include home visits; and,

(iv) Determining whether a referral to a local agency responsible for implementing IDEA is appropriate.

(b) *Prohibition on expulsion.* (1) A program cannot expel or unenroll a child from Head Start because of a child's behavior.

(2) When a child exhibits persistent and serious challenging behaviors, a program must explore all possible steps and document all steps taken to address such problems, and facilitate the child's safe participation in the program. Such steps must include, at a minimum, engaging a mental health consultant, considering the appropriateness of providing appropriate services and supports under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to ensure that the child who satisfies the definition of disability in 29 U.S.C. §705(9)(b) of the Rehabilitation Act is not excluded from the program on the basis of disability, and consulting with the parents and the child's teacher, and:

(i) If the child has an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education program (IEP), the program must consult with the agency

responsible for the IFSP or IEP to ensure the child receives the needed support services; or,

(ii) If the child does not have an IFSP or IEP, the program must collaborate, with parental consent, with the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA to determine the child's eligibility for services.

(3) If, after a program has explored all possible steps and documented all steps taken as described in paragraph (b)(2) of this section, a program, in consultation with the parents, the child's teacher, the agency responsible for implementing IDEA (if applicable), and the mental health consultant, determines that the child's continued enrollment presents a continued serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children and determines the program is not the most appropriate placement for the child, the program must work with such entities to directly facilitate the transition of the child to a more appropriate placement.

EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM SERVICES

Purpose

1302.30

All programs must provide high-quality early education and child development services, including for children with disabilities, that promote children's cognitive, **social, and emotional** growth for later success in school. A center-based or family child care program must embed **responsive and effective teacher-child interactions**. A home-based program must promote secure parent-child relationships and help parents provide high quality early learning experiences. All programs must implement a research-based curriculum, and screening and assessment procedures that support individualization and growth in the areas of development described in the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five* and support family engagement in children's learning and development. A program must deliver developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate learning experiences in

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language, literacy, mathematics, **social and emotional functioning**, approaches to learning, science, physical skills, and creative arts. To deliver such high-quality early education and child development services, a center-based or family child care program must implement, at a minimum, the elements contained in §§1302.31 through 1302.34, and a home-based program must implement, at a minimum, the elements in §§1302.33 and 1302.35.

Teaching and The Learning Environment

1302.31

(a) *Teaching and the learning environment.* A center-based and family child care program must ensure teachers and other relevant staff provide responsive care, effective teaching, and an organized learning environment that promotes healthy development and children's skill growth aligned with the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five*, including for children with disabilities. A program must also support implementation of such environment with integration of regular and ongoing supervision and a system of individualized and ongoing professional development, as appropriate. This includes, at a minimum, the practices described in paragraphs (b) through (e) of this section.

(b) *Effective teaching practices.* (1) Teaching practices must:

(i) Emphasize **nurturing and responsive practices, interactions, and environments that foster trust and emotional security**; are communication and language rich; promote critical thinking and problem-solving; **social, emotional, behavioral**, and language development; provide supportive feedback for learning; motivate continued effort; and support all children's engagement in learning experiences and activities;

(ii) Focus on promoting growth in the developmental progressions described in the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five* by aligning with and using the Framework and the curricula as described in §1302.32 to direct planning

of organized activities, schedules, lesson plans, and the implementation of high-quality early learning experiences that are responsive to and build upon each child's individual pattern of development and learning;

(iii) Integrate child assessment data in individual and group planning; and,

(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in language, literacy, **social and emotional development**, math, science, social studies, creative arts, and physical development that are focused toward achieving progress outlined in the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five*.

(c) *Learning environment.* A program must ensure teachers implement well-organized learning environments with developmentally appropriate schedules, lesson plans, and indoor and outdoor learning experiences that provide adequate opportunities for choice, play, exploration, and experimentation among a variety of learning, sensory, and motor experiences and:

(1) For infants and toddlers, promote **relational learning** and include individualized and small group activities that integrate appropriate daily routines into a flexible schedule of learning experiences; and,

Child Screenings and Assessments

1302.33

(a) *Screening.* (1) In collaboration with each child's parent and with parental consent, a program must complete or obtain a current **developmental screening** to identify concerns regarding a child's developmental, **behavioral**, motor, language, **social**, cognitive, and **emotional skills** within 45 calendar days of when the child first attends the program or, for the home-based program option, receives a home visit. A program that operates for 90 days or less must complete or obtain a current developmental screening within 30 calendar days of when the child first attends the program.

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(2) A program must use one or more research based developmental standardized screening tools to complete the screening. A program must use as part of the screening additional information from family members, teachers, and relevant staff familiar with the child's typical behavior.

(3) If warranted through screening and additional relevant information and with direct guidance from a **mental health** or child development professional a program must, with the parent's consent, promptly and appropriately address any needs identified through:

(i) Referral to the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA for a formal evaluation to assess the child's eligibility for services under IDEA as soon as possible, and not to exceed timelines required under IDEA; and,

(ii) Partnership with the child's parents and the relevant local agency to support families through the formal evaluation process.

(4) If a child is determined to be eligible for services under IDEA, the program must partner with parents and the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA, as appropriate, and deliver the services in subpart F of this part.

(5) If, after the formal evaluation described in paragraph (a)(3)(i) of this section, the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA determines the child is not eligible for early intervention or special education and related services under IDEA, the program must:

(i) Seek guidance from a **mental health** or child development professional to determine if the formal evaluation shows the child has a significant delay in one or more areas of development that is likely to interfere with the child's development and school readiness; and,

(ii) If the child has a significant delay, partner with parents to help the family access services and supports to help address the child's identified needs.

(A) Such additional services and supports maybe available through a child's health insurance or it may be appropriate for the program to provide needed services and supports under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act if the child satisfies the definition of disability in 29 U.S.C. section 705(9)(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the child who satisfies the definition of disability in 29 U.S.C. §705(9)(b) of the Rehabilitation Act is not excluded from the program on the basis of disability.

(B) A program may use program funds for such services and supports when no other sources of funding are available.

(b) *Assessment for individualization.* (1) A program must conduct standardized and structured assessments, which may be observation-based or direct, for each child that provide ongoing information to evaluate the child's developmental level and progress in outcomes aligned to the goals described in the *Head Start Early Learning Child Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five*. Such assessments must result in usable information for teachers, home visitors, and parents and be conducted with sufficient frequency to allow for individualization within the program year.

(2) A program must regularly use information from paragraph (b)(1) of this section along with informal teacher observations and additional information from family and staff, as relevant, to determine a child's strengths and needs, inform and adjust strategies to better support individualized learning and improve teaching practices in center-based and family child care settings, and improve home visit strategies in home-based models.

(3) If warranted from the information gathered from paragraphs (b)(1) and (2) of this section and with direct guidance from a mental health or child development professional and a parent's consent, a program must refer the child to the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA for a formal evaluation to assess a child's eligibility for services under IDEA.

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(c) *Characteristics of screenings and assessments.*

(1) Screenings and assessments must be valid and reliable for the population and purpose for which they will be used, including by being conducted by qualified and trained personnel, and being age, developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate, and appropriate for children with disabilities, as needed.

(2) If a program serves a child who speaks a language other than English, a program must use qualified bilingual staff, contractor, or consultant to:

(i) Assess language skills in English and in the child's home language, to assess both the child's progress in the home language and in English language acquisition;

(ii) Conduct screenings and assessments for domains other than language skills in the language or languages that best capture the child's development and skills in the specific domain; and,

(iii) Ensure those conducting the screening or assessment know and understand the child's language and culture and have sufficient skill level in the child's home language to accurately administer the screening or assessment and to record and understand the child's responses, interactions, and communications.

(3) If a program serves a child who speaks a language other than English and qualified bilingual staff, contractors, or consultants are not able to conduct screenings and assessments, a program must use an interpreter in conjunction with a qualified staff person to conduct screenings and assessments as described in paragraphs (2)(i) through (iii) of this section.

(4) If a program serves a child who speaks a language other than English and can demonstrate that there is not a qualified bilingual staff person or interpreter, then screenings and assessments may be conducted in English. In such a case, a program must also gather and use other information, including structured observations over time and information gathered in a child's home language from the family, for use in

evaluating the child's development and progress.

(d) *Prohibitions on use of screening and assessment data.* The use of screening and assessment items and data on any screening or assessment authorized under this subchapter by any agent of the federal government is prohibited for the purposes of ranking, comparing, or otherwise evaluating individual children for purposes other than research, training, or technical assistance, and is prohibited for the purposes of providing rewards or sanctions for individual children or staff. A program must not use screening or assessments to exclude children from enrollment or participation.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Parent and Family Engagement in Education and Child Development Services

1302.34

(a) *Purpose.* Center-based and family child care programs must structure education and child development services to recognize parents' roles as children's lifelong educators, and to encourage parents to engage in their child's education.

(b) *Engaging parents and family members.* A program must offer opportunities for parents and family members to be involved in the program's education services and implement policies to ensure:

(1) The program's settings are open to parents during all program hours;

(2) Teachers regularly communicate with parents to ensure they are well-informed about their child's routines, activities, and behavior;

Education In Home-Based Programs

1302.35

(a) *Purpose.* A home-based program must provide home visits and group socialization activities that **promote secure parent-child relationships** and

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help parents provide high quality early learning experiences in language, literacy, mathematics, **social and emotional functioning**, approaches to learning, science, physical skills, and creative arts. A program must implement a research-based curriculum that delivers developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate home visits and group socialization activities that support children's cognitive, social, and emotional growth for later success in school.

(c) Home visit experiences. A program that operates the home-based option must ensure all home visits focus on promoting high-quality early learning experiences in the home and growth towards the goals described in the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five and must use such goals and the curriculum to plan home visit activities that implement:

(1) Age and developmentally appropriate, structured child-focused learning experiences;

(2) Strategies and activities that promote parents' ability to support the child's cognitive, social, emotional, language, literacy, and physical development;

(3) Strategies and activities that promote the home as a learning environment that is safe, nurturing, responsive, and language- and communication- rich;

(i) **Promotes the parent's role as the child's teacher through experiences focused on the parent-child relationship and, as appropriate, the family's traditions, culture, values,**

(ii) Encourage parents to share experiences related to their children's development with other parents in order to strengthen parent-child relationships and to help promote parents understanding of child development;

(3) For parents with preschoolers, group socializations also must provide opportunities for parents to participate in activities that support parenting skill development or family partnership goals identified in §1302.52(c), as appropriate and must emphasize peer group interactions designed to promote children's

social, emotional and language development, and progress towards school readiness goals, while encouraging parents to observe and actively participate in activities, as appropriate.

(f) Screening and assessments. A program that operates the home-based option must implement provisions in §1302.33 and inform parents about the purposes of and the results from screenings and assessments and discuss their child's progress.

Child Health Status and Care

1302.42

(d) *Extended follow-up care.* (1) A program must facilitate further diagnostic testing, evaluation, treatment, and follow-up plan, as appropriate, by a licensed or certified professional for each child with a health problem or developmental delay, such as elevated lead levels or abnormal hearing or vision results that may affect child's development, learning, or **behavior**.

(2) A program must develop a system to track referrals and services provided and monitor the implementation of a follow-up plan to meet any treatment needs associated with a health, oral health, **social and emotional**, or developmental problem.

Family Engagement

1302.50

(a) *Purpose.* A program must integrate parent and family engagement strategies into all systems and program services to support family wellbeing and promote children's learning and development. Programs are encouraged to develop innovative **two-generation approaches that address prevalent needs of families** across their program that may leverage community partnerships or other funding sources.

(b) *Family engagement approach.* A program must:

(1) Recognize parents as their children's primary teachers and nurturers and implement intentional strategies to engage parents in their children's

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learning and development and **support parent child relationships**, including specific strategies for father engagement;

(2) Develop relationships with parents and structure services to encourage trust and respectful, ongoing two-way communication between staff and parents to create welcoming program environments that incorporate the unique cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds of families in the program and community;

(3) Collaborate with families in a family partnership process that **identifies needs, interests, strengths, goals, and services and resources that support family well-being, including family safety, health, and economic stability**;

Community Partnerships and Coordination with Other Early Childhood and Education Programs

1302.53

(a) *Community partnerships.* (1) A program must establish ongoing collaborative relationships and partnerships with community organizations such as establishing joint agreements, procedures, or contracts and arranging for onsite delivery of services as appropriate, to facilitate access to community services that are responsive to children's and families' needs and family partnership goals, and community needs and resources, as determined by the community assessment.

(2) A program must establish necessary collaborative relationships and partnerships, with community organizations that may include:

(i) Health care providers, including child and adult **mental health professionals**, Medicaid managed care networks, dentists, other health professionals, nutritional service providers, providers of prenatal and postnatal support, and substance abuse treatment providers;

(ii) Individuals and agencies that provide services to children with disabilities and their families, elementary schools, state preschool providers, and providers of child care services;

(iii) Family preservation and support services and child protective services and any other agency to which child abuse must be reported under state or tribal law;

(vii) Domestic violence prevention and support providers; and,

(viii) Other organizations or businesses that may provide support and resources to families.

(b) *Coordination with other programs and systems.* A program must take an active role in promoting coordinated systems of comprehensive early childhood services to low-income children and families in their community through communication, cooperation, and the sharing of information among agencies and their community partners, while protecting the privacy of [child records](#) in accordance with subpart C of part 1303 of this chapter and applicable federal, state, local, and tribal laws.

Enrolled Pregnant Women

1302.80

(c) A program must facilitate the ability of all enrolled pregnant women to access comprehensive services through referrals that, at a minimum, include nutritional counseling, food assistance, oral health care, **mental health services, substance abuse prevention and treatment**, and emergency shelter or transitional housing in cases of domestic violence.

(d) A program must provide a **newborn visit with each mother and baby to offer support and identify family needs**. A program must schedule the **newborn visit within two weeks after the infant's birth**.

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STAFF COMPETENCY AND WELLNESS

Staff Qualifications and Competency Requirements

1302.91

(a) *Purpose.* A program must ensure all staff, consultants, and contractors engaged in the delivery of program services have sufficient knowledge, training and experience, and competencies to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of their positions and to ensure high-quality service delivery in accordance with the program performance standards. A program must provide ongoing training and professional development to support staff in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

(ii) A program must ensure **all mental health consultants are licensed or certified mental health professionals**. A program must use mental health consultants with knowledge of and experience in serving young children and their families, if available in the community.

Staff Health and Wellness

1302.93

(b) A program must make **mental health and wellness** information available to staff regarding health issues that may affect their job performance, and must provide **regularly scheduled opportunities to learn about mental health, wellness, and health education**.

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