



A Parent's Guide

To the Head Start Home-Based Program Option



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Welcome to our Head Start home-based program!

You may be the mother or father of a baby or a toddler in Early Head Start, or you may be the parent of a Head Start preschooler. Whatever the age of your child, helping him or her learn and grow is a big job. It is an exciting job. It is a hard job. Every mother and father, every family, can use some support. You can get this support from your Head Start home-based program and your home visitor.

If your family is enrolled in our home-based program, this guide is for you. It includes three parts:

Part One: The Head Start Home-Based Option describes what a home-based program is and what you can expect.

Part Two: You and Your Head Start Home Visitor explores how you and your Head Start home visitor can work together to best support your child's development.

Part Three: Things You Can Do: Turning Everyday Moments into Learning Moments offers ideas for how you can help your child learn day-by-day using objects and materials in your home regardless whether you are new to a program or a long-time participant.

We hope you find this information helpful. We look forward to working with you.

"As a parent, you get a say-so about what's going on in the program. Parents make the choices."

—Mother of a preschooler

"What you learn helps you in your community, with your family, definitely with your child—and it makes you feel good about yourself."

—Father of a toddler



child's education and healthy development. You can also advise the staff about program policies, elect representatives to the Policy Council (see below), and participate in hiring new staff members.

You will be invited to attend parent meetings where you will have a chance to share your experiences. You can also learn about topics such as feeding an infant or dealing with the challenging behaviors of a toddler or preschooler.

You may want to run for a seat on your program's Policy Council or Policy Committee. As a member of this group, you will work with the agency's governing body and management staff as well as with other community representatives to make policy decisions and plans about content areas such as education, health, parent involvement, and the building of partnerships with families and the community.

Getting Started: Home Visits and Socializations

During the first home visit, you, your family, and your home visitor will begin to get to know one another. You and other family members will introduce your child. Your home visitor will introduce him- or herself and tell you about the program.

Together, you will decide on a regular day and time for home visits that works for you. If the time you select is a time when your spouse or partner or other family members are not available, then you and your home visitor will need to think about ways to

share what goes on during home visits with them. And you will have to remember to ask for their ideas and questions.

Your home visitor will let you know when and where socializations will take place. Some programs may offer transportation. If not, your home visitor will help you figure out a way to get to socializations if you do not have a car or easy access to public transportation.

If you need to change an appointment or miss a socialization, for example, because of illness or a family emergency, please contact your home visitor. You can expect that he or she will do the same. You can record important contact information below:

Day and time for home visits:



Day, time, and place for socializations:

Contact number for my home visitor:

Some Things to Think About



Here are some things to think about with family members. Your thoughts may give you ideas of things you want to share with your home visitor:

We feel good about our family because

Over the next 3 months, we would like our family to

Our family is having trouble with

The best thing about being a parent is

The hardest thing about being a parent is

Our baby/toddler/preschooler loves to

I want my baby/toddler/preschooler to

I want to learn more about



It's fun. You get to talk with other parents.

—Mother of an infant

I see him do things that he doesn't do at home and it gets me really excited.

—Mother of a preschooler

- ▶ **If you are the parent of a preschooler**, the focus of these group experiences is learning about how your child interacts with other people. What you learn will help you figure out ways to support your child's social development.

What happens at socializations may vary. Your home visitor will be there doing group activities with children. These activities will give you the chance to learn more about how your child gets to know and plays with other children. You will also be able to see how the staff person guides children's behavior (for example, by giving them choices), and you will get ideas that you can try at home. Sometimes you and other parents will be invited to lead activities. At

other times, you and other parents may have a group discussion with one staff person while another staff person is with the children.

No matter what your child's age, group socializations will give you the chance to

- ▶ be out of the house and meet other parents;
- ▶ assist in organizing activities, gathering materials, and preparing snacks;
- ▶ share what you know and learn with other parents and Early Head Start or Head Start staff members;
- ▶ attend presentations about safety, nutrition, discipline, or other topics of interest;
- ▶ learn that you are not alone in the challenges and joys of raising a young child;
- ▶ share activity ideas and things you learn with family members; and most important of all,
- ▶ strengthen your relationship with your child.



visitor. Ask them. Learn together. Over time, you will become a team. And through teamwork, you can make a positive difference in your child's life today—and in the future.

Who Does What

As members of any team, each of you has different responsibilities. During home visits—and, of course, in between—one of your jobs as a parent is to introduce and share interesting and fun activities with your child. You are important to your child, so as you sing to your baby, build a block tower with your toddler, or create an obstacle course for your preschooler, you can help your child feel good about him- or herself and excited about learning, and you can make your relationship even stronger. (See the section titled **You Are Your Child's First Teacher** on page 13 for more information.)

While you focus on your child, your home visitor will focus on you. He or she may focus on you in a variety of ways such as showing you how you might do an activity like reading with your infant and toddler, or bringing a needed ingredient for a recipe you want to try out with your preschooler.

As you feel ready, your home visitor will step back, and you will take over. Sometimes, the home visitor may sit and watch what you are doing. At other times, he or she may join in the fun. And he or she will always be available to listen, ask questions, learn from you, offer suggestions, provide information, and share the ups and downs that are part of parenting a young child.

Planning Together

Planning will be an ongoing part of your work together. You bring your in-depth knowledge of your child to the process. Your home visitor brings his or her experience of planning for many children of a similar age.

Together, you will share ideas and choose activities and experiences for you to do with your child—during home visits and in between. Don't be surprised if you find that your child responds in one way when you do an activity and in another way with a different family member. Each relationship between a child and adult is a special one and that relationship shapes what happens between them. You and family members can learn about doing activities from watching one another and sharing ideas.



"Basically now when our home visitor comes, I take over.

—Mother of three children

"When a parent is doing an activity, I step back. I want them to be in charge. If they need encouragement or help, I'll be there to help them.

—A home visitor



PART THREE: Things You Can Do

Turning Everyday Moments into Learning Moments

The following three resources can be used on your own or with your home visitor to explore the many ways that you help your children learn during your every day routines.

Children are born eager to learn. They want to know everything. They constantly explore to find the answers to their many questions. What happens when I'm hungry and I cry? Shake this rattle? Kick at the mobile hanging over the changing table? Hold my arms out to you? Drop my spoon? Poke this play dough with my finger? Flush the toilet? Take another child's cracker? Stack this block on top of another one? Mix red paint with blue? Drop a plastic spoon in a pan of water, then a metal spoon?

On your home visit, and during the week in between visits, you have many opportunities to support your child's learning during ordinary experiences that happen each day, such as preparing a meal, walking to the store, or taking a bath. Use these ideas to think about the things that you can do every day to help your children wonder and learn about their world.

"Your home is a natural learning environment. You can use what you already have. You don't have to spend lots of money for children to enjoy themselves and learn."

—A home visitor

"I like to make puzzles out of cardboard. I really can't afford to buy them so I make puzzles that show body parts, different fruits, numbers ... anything that will help her learn."

—Parent of a preschooler



You Are Your Child's First Teacher:

How You Help Your Children Learn

Whether you are new to parenting and home-based programs or are the parent of several children who have been in a program for years, you are your child's first teacher. Because you are so important to your child, they pay attention to what you say and do. They learn by watching and listening to you and other family members day after day.

But how do you help your child learn? To discover the answer, look to your own experience.

Think about someone who helped you learn something new. It could be someone you knew as a child or met as an adult. This person should be someone who helped you feel good to be a learner.

What did you learn? You may have learned colors and shapes, a song, the alphabet. You may have learned how to write your name, ride your bike, tie your shoe. Or perhaps you learned how to take the subway, drive a car, bake a cake, program your VCR, or use a computer.

Think for a few minutes about what this person did to help you learn. For example, he or she may have

- ▶ planned interesting things for you to see and do;
- ▶ been there when you needed help;
- ▶ asked you open-ended questions—questions that have many answers;
- ▶ listened to you;
- ▶ discovered your interests and figured out ways to help you learn more about them;
- ▶ kept you safe;
- ▶ given you enough time to explore;
- ▶ been patient if you spilled something or made a mistake; or
- ▶ been happy and excited with you when you discovered something new.

You can help your child learn by doing these same things. Some you may already do. Others may be new ideas that you want to try. Your home visitor can help you discover what works best for you and your child.

"The parent is the primary educator of his child. There is nobody that has a better connection with your child."

—Father of a preschooler

There's No Place Like Your Home for Learning: *How Children Learn From Everyday Moments*

Your child learns about him- or herself, other people, and the surrounding world every day. For your child, everyday moments—getting dressed, preparing a meal, setting the table, taking a walk, taking a bath, reading a book—are learning moments. They are filled with interesting things to see, touch, smell, hear, taste, explore, and do. For example, let's look at what your child might learn from getting dressed (see box below).

Your home is filled with interesting things to see and do for your infant, toddler, or preschooler. Things that are fun and can

help them learn are right there in your own kitchen, living room, closet, and even the garage.

Some of these (as you will see in the chart on the next page) can be turned into fine toys and materials to explore and learn from. But be aware; others can be dangerous. These dangerous items include glass bottles, toys or other objects such as balloons and marbles that can cause choking, plastic bags that can cause suffocation, and cleaning solutions or medicines that can turn into poisons in a child's hands. Remember, young children are curious and

Getting Dressed

When you:	Your child might be learning:
Hold your baby securely but gently as you change a wet shirt.	I can trust you to keep me comfortable. I can trust you to keep me safe.
Talk with your baby about what you are doing; pause and listen when he or she coos and babbles back.	People take turns listening and talking when they talk with each other.
Play peek-a-boo as you pull your toddler's shirt over his or her head.	People still exist even though I can't see them.
Let your toddler decide between wearing red pants and the green pants with flowers.	You respect me. What I want matters. I can decide.
Hang a hook at child level so your preschooler can hang up his or her coat.	I am a helper. I can hang up my coat all by myself.
Start the zipper on your preschooler's jacket but let him or her finish pulling it up.	I can do it! When I need a little help, I can count on you.

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