



FAMILY HANDBOOK

MISSION

From Day 1 to Grade 1, Richland First Steps empowers our community to nurture children, so they are ready to thrive in school.

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Purpose of Handbook & Declaration of Understanding

The handbook explains the policies and procedures of the Richland County First Steps Early Head Start program. Please reference the book for questions you may have about our programs. This handbook is also located on our website at www.richlandfirststeps.org

Information to become familiar with includes:

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The South Carolina Department of Social Services and Office of Head Start – Head Start Performance Standards require that we verify our parents have received a copy of our Parent Handbook. You will be asked to sign a form stating that you have received a copy of the Parent Handbook.

As a parent in Early Head Start, you are committing to these requirements so that your child(ren) will have every opportunity to fully participate in the educational program provided by Early Head Start/Head Start. Embracing this philosophy of partnership ensures your child's continued participation in the program. As the child's guardian, you will attend Registration | Orientation before your child(ren) can attend the center and/or home-based program. During the Registration | Orientation, you will complete the required registration forms, receive an overview of RFS, gain insight into the Parent Handbook, and review and sign a "Declaration of Understanding" stating that you will commit to the following Early Head Start requirements:

- Attending two Parent/Teacher Conferences during the 2025 / 26 Program Year
- Having two Home Visits with your child(ren) teaching staff, and family support advocates each school year
- Having weekly Home Visits with your Family Support Advocates in the Home-based program
- Having your child(ren) at school everyday
- Having your child(ren) arrive on time, remain until dismissal, and leave promptly on time
- Completing your child(ren)'s Ages and Stages questionnaire, with your child's teaching staff and/or Family Support Advocate
- Completing and reviewing the Family Assessment and Family Goal plan with the Family Support Advocate throughout the program year
- Maintaining regular communication, collaborating with the assigned teaching staff and/or Family Support Advocates to establish family goals, and teacher(s) to support your child(ren)'s education outcomes
- Attendance is required daily unless the child(ren) are sick



Richland County First Steps (RFS) is a 501(c)(3) agency with a mission to get Richland County's children ready to thrive in school. Funded in 1999, RFS is one of the 46 county partnerships that collectively served 34,575 children across the state in previous years. RFS proudly serves over 125 children from prenatal through age three, and in the Lower Richland area, we serve children from prenatal through age five. RFS works directly with parents, children, and child care providers to raise the quality of care available to young children. RFS is funded by the state of South Carolina First Steps, Office of Head Start, and private donations.

Vision

A community committed to the school readiness of its children

Mission

From Day 1 to Grade 1, RFS empowers our community to nurture children, so they are ready to thrive in school.

Our Values

- Trust | We will foster trust within the organization and the community
- Love | "Love is the best motivator for learning and growth." -Dr. Becky Bailey, Founder of Conscious Discipline®
- Racial Equity | We will work to change the systems that keep families from having the tools and resources to equip their children for success in school and life
- Respect | We value the feelings, wishes, rights, and traditions of others
- Quality | Quality + Readiness = Success



Program Objectives & South Carolina Early Learning Standards

The objectives are the steps the program takes to reach our vision while continuing to support the mission of RFS. The objectives are:

- Evaluate and strengthen organizational development allowing for the delivery of coordinated and integrated quality services while utilizing our internal resources
- Effectively use data to make program decisions and manage information using technology
- Maximize our funding resources while maintaining quality programming
- Analyze program services and implement new ways to enhance curriculum and child development, family services and engagement, and parent involvement
- Establish and strengthen relations with the community, schools, and agencies to develop valuable partnerships and collaboration.

Learning Standards

The standards are a clear and comprehensive set of expectations to guide early learning programs. The purpose is to support the development and well-being of young children and to foster their learning. They are very much in alignment with our Creative Curriculum, Teaching Strategies – GOLD objectives, and our beliefs about how children learn and develop.

South Carolina Early Learning Standards: Development Domains

- Approaches to Play and Learning (APL)
- Emotional and Social Development (ESD)
- Health and Physical Development (HPD)
- Language Development and Communication (LDC)
- Mathematical Thinking and Expression (MTE)
- Cognitive Development (CD)

Welcome from the Executive Director



Elizabeth Kabalka, Executive Director

Dear Families,

Welcome to RFS!

We write this letter with great excitement and gratitude, knowing that you have chosen to partner with us to provide the best early childhood experience for your child and your family.

Our Commitment to Your Child's Success

We believe that you are your child's first and most important teacher. That's why we work hand in hand with families to create a safe, nurturing, and educationally enriching environment. Through collaboration, we support your child's growth in all areas of development—cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language.

Our Tools and Approach

To ensure we meet your child's individual needs, we utilize a variety of research-based tools and assessments:

- Creative Curriculum – A comprehensive, research-based curriculum that supports active learning and exploration.
- Teaching Strategies GOLD – A formative assessment system that tracks your child's developmental progress.
- Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) – A developmental screening tool we use in partnership with you and your child's teaching team.
- Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) – Classroom observations to ensure our learning environments are high quality and responsive.
- CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) – A system to support and strengthen teacher-child interactions and communication.

Family Engagement and Support

We encourage you to stay involved and engaged through:

- Home Visits
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Monthly parent meetings
- Policy Council membership

Welcome from the Executive Director

Your input, participation, and advocacy are essential to the success of not only your child but all the children in our program.

Our Staff

We are proud to have cultivated a team of highly qualified and compassionate staff members—including teachers, family support advocates, center directors, and health/disabilities coordinators. Our staff meets all state and federal qualifications and is committed to delivering excellence in early childhood education.

In Closing

Whether you are a returning family or new to our program, we welcome you with open arms. We are thrilled to be part of your child's early learning journey and look forward to building a strong partnership with you over the coming years. Together, we will cultivate a learning experience rooted in joy, growth, and success.

Thank you for being a part of the RFS family.

Warm regards,

Elizabeth Kabalka
Executive Director



Program Yearly Calendar

We kindly ask all families to use the program calendar to arrange child-care and/or schedule work accordingly based on scheduled closure days.

Please note the following:

- Final Fridays | Center and Home-based will be closed on the last Friday of each month for staff professional development and Home Visits - with the exception of November and December.
- Be sure to review the yearly calendar for the exact dates of these closures
- Monthly calendars will be distributed at the end of each for the upcoming month
- Reminders will be posted at the centers and shared through our interactive communication system

All non-service days are scheduled in advance to allow adequate time to make alternate care arrangements. We appreciate your cooperation and understanding as we continue to support quality learning environments for all the children we serve.

PLEASE SEE CALENDAR ON PAGE 9



August

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

1st - PD training (CLOSED)
 4th - First Day of ECE Program
 13th - HB Family Meeting
 27th - RW Family Meeting
 28th - VW Family Meeting
 29th - Final Friday (CLOSED)

February

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

10th - HB Family Meeting
 14th - Valentine's Day
 25th - RW Family Meeting
 26th - VW Family Meeting
 27th - Final Friday (CLOSED)

September

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

1st - Labor Day (CLOSED)
 15th - HB Family Meeting
 24th - RW Family Meeting
 25th - VW Family Meeting
 26th - Final Friday (CLOSED)

March

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

2nd - 6th Read Across America
 17th - HB Family Meeting
 25th - RW Family Meeting
 26th - VW Family Meeting
 27th - Final Friday (CLOSED)

October

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

16th - HB Family Meeting
 20th - 24th P/T conferences.
 29th - RW Family Meeting
 30th - VW Family Meeting
 31st - Halloween / Fall Festival

April

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

2nd - HB Family Meeting
 6th - 10th - Spring Break (CLOSED)
 13th - 17th - Week of the Young Child
 22nd - RW Family Meeting
 23rd - VW Family Meeting
 24th - Final Friday (CLOSED)

November

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

4th - Election Day (ONLY RW CLOSED)
 4th - VW & Main Office OPEN
 12th - HB Family Meeting
 19th - RW Family Meeting
 20th - VW Family Meeting
 27th & 28th - Thanksgiving Break (CLOSED)

May

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

4th - 8th - Staff Appreciation Week
 6th - HB Family Meeting
 25th - Memorial Day (CLOSED)
 27th - RW Family Meeting
 28th - VW Family Meeting
 29th - Final Friday (CLOSED)

December

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

8th - HB Family Meeting
 10th - RW Family Meeting
 11th - VW Family Meeting
 22nd - 31st - Winter Break (CLOSED)

June

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

10th - HB Family Meeting
 19th - Juneteenth Day
 24th - RW Family Meeting
 25th - VW Family Meeting
 26th - Final Friday (CLOSED)
 29th & 30th - Summer Break (CLOSED)

January

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

1st - 2nd - Winter Break (CLOSED)
 5th - Staff Returns
 6th - Children Returns
 19th - MLK Jr. Day
 28th - RW Family Meeting
 29th - VW Family Meeting)
 30th - Final Friday (CLOSED)

July

SU	M	TU	W	TH	F	SA
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

1st - 3rd - Summer Break (CLOSED)
 13th - 17th - Parent /Teacher Conference
 14th - HB Family Meeting
 20th & 21st - VW Registration
 22nd - VW/RW Family Meeting
 23rd & 24th - RW Registration
 27th - 31st - Professional Development Week

FINAL FRIDAYS = AGENCY CLOSED.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Stay connected with Richland First Steps! Follow us on social media to stay in the loop with important updates, reminders, program news, event highlights, and closure notices. It's the easiest way to stay informed and engaged with all things RFS!

Find us on Facebook ,Instagram and LinkedIn! Bookmark our website!



SCAN TO FOLLOW
US ON FACEBOOK



SCAN TO FOLLOW
US ON INSTAGRAM



SCAN TO FOLLOW
US ON LINKEDIN



SCAN TO VISIT
OUR WEBSITE

Program Operations

Locations	Address	Communications	Hours of Operation
RFS- Main Office	1800 St. Julian Place Ste. 406 Columbia, SC 29204	Enrollment - 803.553.1814 Business - 803.256.7237 Fax - 803.212.4205 www.richlandfirststeps.org	8:00am - 4:00pm
Richland First Steps Virginia Wingard Memorial Classrooms Orange, Red, Blue, Indigo, Yellow, Purple, Green	1500 Broad River Road Columbia, SC 29210	Voice & Text 803.704.5205	8:00am - 4:00pm (staff) 8:30am - 4:00pm (families)
Richland First Steps Ridgewood Missionary Baptist Church Classrooms Orange, Red, Green, Purple	5324 Ridgeway Street Columbia, SC 29203	Voice - 803.754.1566 Text - 803.509.2878	8:00am - 4:00pm (staff) 8:30am - 4:00pm (families)

Program Options

RFS (RFS) is proud to offer a variety of learning experiences for families as well as services to pregnant women. All program options are designed to enhance children's school readiness through curriculum, and programs that strengthen emotional, mental, social, cognitive, and physical development.

Early Head Start

Early Head Start (EHS) provides services at no cost to low-income pregnant women and their families and children birth to age 3.

Center-Based | Center-based services facilitate child development, support parental roles, and promote self-sufficiency. The center-based program is available for families who need center-based services. We provide high - quality child development classes where infants to 3-year - olds receive full-day round child care in age grouped classrooms of eight children to two teachers. Children receive age-appropriate nutritious breakfast, lunch and afternoon snack. Each family is assigned and has on-going contact with their assigned Family Support Advocate (FSA), who will help with goal setting and access to needed services. Families participating in the center-based program are also encouraged to attend family learning group/socialization events, participate in the Policy Council, and attend monthly parent meetings.

CURRICULA | Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers & Preschool

Home-Based

The home-based program allows families to meet weekly with their assigned Family Support Advocate (FSA) for educational growth, parental support, and age-appropriate learning approaches in the home. Family learning groups/socialization events, group connections and parent meetings allow families to support one another. Through our home-based program, families will have access to developmental and health screenings for their child(ren), nutrition counseling, and links to community support.

CURRICULA | Parents as Teachers

Pregnant Women and Expectant Families

RFS services to pregnant women are home-based on a schedule determined by the pregnant mother and her Family Support Advocate (FSA). Pregnant women are offered nutrition counseling, breastfeeding information, and help in scheduling medical appointments, as well as help accessing other needed services. Center-based services may be available once the baby is 8 weeks old.



Head Start Performance Standard's Overview

Head Start Performance Standards dictate the requirements for Head Start programs, including those related to participation. These standards cover various aspects like eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and attendance, ensuring comprehensive services for eligible children and families. Parent participation in program activities is voluntary and not a condition for a child's enrollment, [according to HeadStart.gov](https://www.headstart.gov).

Key Aspects of Participation in Head Start Performance Standards:

Eligibility and Recruitment | Head Start programs serve low-income families with children from birth to age five, including those experiencing homelessness or receiving public assistance.

Enrollment | Programs must have a user-friendly enrollment process and regularly examine it for improvements.

Attendance | Head Start programs must adhere to state immunization and attendance requirements, with exceptions for homeless children.

Voluntary Parent Participation | Parent participation in program activities, including data sharing consent, is voluntary and not a condition for enrollment.


Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) | Programs should participate in their state or local QRIS to the extent practicable.

Collaboration and Communication with Parents | Programs must foster collaboration and communication with parents.

Family Engagement | Head Start programs are designed to support families and promote their engagement in their child's education and development.

Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework

The role of the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF) in program planning and practice is mandated by the Head Start Act and by the Head Start Program Performance Standards. The Performance Standards describe required teaching practices, learning environments, curricula, assessments and professional development. The HSELOF identified what young children should know and be able to do. Fully implementing the Performance Standards and HSELOF will promote high quality services and practice for teaching and learning so that all children can succeed.

CENTRAL DOMAINS					
	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Literacy	Cognition	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
Infant/Toddler Domains	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Communications	Cognition	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
Pre-schooler Domains	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Communications	Mathematics Development	Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development
			Literacy	Scientific Reasoning	

The grid above expands on how children progress across key areas of learning and development and specify learning outcomes in these areas.

Program Policies

Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment & Attendance (ERSEA)

Children are registered by providing required information including, but not limited to enrollment paperwork, age verification of the child, documented verification of family's income, proof of residency, and child's medical and shot records. Registered children are placed on a waiting list. Children are enrolled into the program from the waiting list based on RFS' Eligibility Scoring Selection Process. For a child to be placed on the waiting list, the entire enrollment process must be completed.

To be eligible for our program

- Families must reside in designated zip codes in Richland County.
- Children must be prenatal to 3-year-olds for our Early Head Start program
- Family's income must not exceed program guidelines
- Families must meet program eligibility criteria

Early Head Start | Home-Based Program

Early Head Start supports and guides families in the intellectual, social, emotional, nutritional, language, and physical development of their infant, toddlers (two-year-olds & three-year-olds), to promote success later in school and in life. Early Head Start views the parent as their child's first and most important teacher. As such, we ask that you are committed to taking an active role in developing and practicing age-appropriate activities for you and your child.

- The program year is July 1st to June 31st. Home Visits are required for the program. Weekly Home Visits are a requirement for continued enrollment in Early Head Start. Please schedule other appointments so that they do not disrupt your Home Visit schedule whenever possible.
- Home Visits will be conducted weekly for the home-based program, 90-minute sessions with family members and the child(ren) enrolled in the program, and a minimum of 46 visits per program year.
- Family Support Advocates will maintain a weekly schedule with your family's schedule in mind. If you must cancel a visit, please let the Family Support Advocate know with as much advanced notice as possible. Your Family Support Advocate will notify you if the visit needs to be rescheduled.
- Agendas are based on parent needs/concerns, Family Support Advocates observations, and child abilities.
- The Family Strengthening Director will make occasional staff observations during your Home Visit time.
- The Program Director, Education Coach, Behavioral Health Coach, Health Coordinator, EHS Intake Coordinator, and/or other special service staff may join your Family Support Advocate on request of the parent or the Family Support Advocate.
- Socialization is a type of structured play group. We are required to schedule 22 socializations per program year. Parents will have a chance to interact with other families and their children in an enriching and stimulating environment. Participation in socialization(s) is strongly encouraged.
- Curriculum goals and experiences:
 - Are in line with your family's culture
 - Are built on your child's interest and abilities
 - Use responsive interactions as the primary vehicle for learning
 - Are developmentally appropriate and engaging

Early Head Start Relationships and Boundaries

Your Family Support Advocate will be in your home every week. As your relationship and trust grow, it may begin to feel more like a friendship than a professional "working" relationship. It is our policy that all RFS' staff maintain professional relationships and boundaries with the families they serve. To protect the delicate balance between professional and personal relationships, the following practices are not permitted:

- Attending family social events & activities
- Attending religious events & life-cycle events such as birthday parties
- Accepting non-themed gifts from families
- Performing favors for families
- Bartering with families for goods and services
- Managing relationships between families
- Disclosing non-relevant or intimate details of personal information to families.

Infant Safe Sleep Overview

Infant Sleeping Practices

Head Start Performance Standards mandate safe sleep practices to minimize the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other sleep-related deaths. These practices include placing infants on their backs to sleep on a firm, flat surface with no loose bedding, and ensuring a smoke-free environment. Additionally, Head Start programs must educate families on safe sleep practices and work with them to create safe sleep environments.

Sleep plays a vital role in the health and development of infants. Ensuring infants sleep safely should be a top priority for parents and caregivers.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the leading cause of death for infants is Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID), which includes Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Practicing the following ABCs of safe sleep can reduce the risk of SUID and other sleep-related dangers.

Here's a more detailed breakdown of the key aspects of safe sleep in Head Start:

Infant Sleeping Practices:

- **Back to Sleep** | Infants should always be placed on their backs to sleep, unless there is a medical reason documented by a pediatrician.
- **Firm, and Flat Surface** | A firm, flat mattress or surface designed for infants is essential for safe sleep.
- **No Loose Bedding** | Pillows, blankets, bumper pads, stuffed animals, and other soft items should be kept out of the infant's sleep space.
- **Appropriate Clothing** | Infants should be dressed in lightweight clothing to avoid overheating, which is a risk factor for SIDS.
- **Exclusive Sleep Space** | Cribs, bassinets, or play yards should be used only for sleep and should be designated for the infant's exclusive use.
- **Active Supervision** | When infants are sleeping, staff should actively supervise them, even if they are sleeping quietly.

Requirements:

- **Family Education** | Head Start programs are required to educate families about safe sleep practices and work with them to implement these practices at home, according to Head Start policies.
- **Safe Sleep Environment** | Programs must ensure that sleeping arrangements in their facilities meet current safety standards and are free from hazards.
- **Staff Training** | Staff members should be trained on safe sleep practices and be able to demonstrate them to families.

Infant Sleeping Practices

- **Documentation** | Programs should document all safe sleep practices and any relevant medical information related to a child's sleep.
- **Rest Time** | Programs should provide a designated rest time for children, with appropriate supervision and a quiet environment.
- **No Forced Sleep** | Children should not be forced to sleep, and alternatives should be provided for those who do not fall asleep, according to Neighborhood House Association Employee Portal

Classroom Ratio and Adult Supervision

Head Start performance standards related to staff-to-child ratios and supervision require programs to maintain specific ratios based on the age of the children and the type of setting (center-based, family child care, etc.). These standards also emphasize the importance of "active supervision," which involves constant observation, interaction, and engagement with children to ensure their safety and well-being.

Ratio Requirements| Birth to 36 months

Two teachers for up to eight children or three teachers for up to nine children, with each teacher responsible for no more than four children.

Active Supervision | The Head Start Performance Standards requires "active supervision," where staff are positioned to constantly observe all children, anticipate their actions, and intervene when necessary.

Consistent Staffing | Programs should minimize staff changes to promote continuity of care for individual children.

Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA)

Head Start's Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) performance standards are a critical component of the Head Start program, ensuring that the most vulnerable children and families receive needed services. These standards govern how programs identify and enroll children, track attendance, and manage recruitment and selection processes to prioritize those with the greatest need.

Here's a breakdown of the key aspects:

1. Eligibility:

- Head Start programs must adhere to specific income guidelines and other eligibility criteria established by the Office of Head Start.
- Programs have flexibility to serve families with incomes above the poverty level in certain circumstances, such as offering a limited number of slots to families with incomes between 100-130% of the poverty level.
- Pregnant women and children in Tribal programs are eligible regardless of income.

2. Recruitment:

- Programs need to actively recruit eligible children and families, utilizing data to understand community demographics and needs.
- Recruitment efforts should focus on reaching families with the greatest need.
- Some resources suggest strategies for building responsive systems for recruitment, such as leveraging community assessments and data to inform outreach efforts.

3. Selection:

- Head Start programs must have clear and transparent selection criteria to prioritize eligible families, particularly those most in need.
- Programs should consider factors like income, age, and specific needs of the child and family.
- Flexibility exists to prioritize children with disabilities and those in specific situations like migrant or seasonal families.

4. Enrollment:

- Programs need to ensure a smooth and efficient enrollment process to fill all available slots and maintain full enrollment.
- Strategies include streamlining processes, offering user-friendly experiences, and addressing potential barriers to enrollment.
- Programs must also develop and maintain waiting lists for eligible children.

5. Attendance:

- Head Start programs have policies and procedures to promote regular attendance for enrolled children.

Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA)

- This includes working with families and other stakeholders to address barriers to attendance and ensure children can participate in the program regularly.

6. Performance Standards and Monitoring:

- The Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) provide the framework for ERSEA implementation, outlining specific requirements for each element.
- The Office of Head Start monitors programs to ensure compliance with these standards.
- ERSEA assessment tools are available to help programs identify areas for improvement and ensure they are effectively serving the most vulnerable children.

7. Training:

- Head Start programs must train staff involved in ERSEA, including those who determine eligibility, to ensure they understand and can implement the standards effectively.
- Training should cover topics like eligibility determination, data collection, and working with families with sensitivity and respect.

Confidentiality, Disclosure & Consent

Confidentiality

State and federal law requires that student education records be maintained and confidential. RFS ensures that the appropriate steps are taken to protect certain information and records, as confidential. Individuals having access to confidential information while employed by RFS are reminded that their legal obligation to maintain such confidence extends beyond their employment and they are prohibited from releasing, disclosing, or otherwise disseminating confidential information or records after leaving RFS Agency.

To ensure the confidentiality of records, children's files will be kept in a locked drawer or cabinet. Only employees directly involved with a family will have regular access to the child's or family's file. Administrative staff will have access as needed, and in the event of an audit by the funding agency, such as the Office of Head Start, files may be viewed by necessary auditors.

Parents will be informed of the purpose of all the program information collected. The information collected will be restricted to the purpose of assisting the children's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development. Children's names and health status will not be available for public access, usage, or display. During program review/assessment, members of the review/assessment team may review records to ensure program compliance.

Disclosure and Consent

The list below shares what information may be shared (disclosed) and how. In all cases, there must be a reason the information is shared (disclosed) and to whom the records were shared. Your acknowledgement of this policy is necessary. Just as with other policies, your understanding and acknowledgement does not give the program consent to release information where otherwise prohibited.

Examples (not meant to be all inclusive) of consent items:

- Disclosure WITH Parental Consent - Any information in the child's record not related to either example below. The consent must be specific, and consent must be given prior to information being shared.
- Disclosure WITHOUT Parental Consent but with Parental Notice and Opportunity to Refuse - Information from records that are related to the child's enrollment or transfer into another program (such as Early Head Start or the Richland 1 School District
- Disclosure WITHOUT Parental Consent
 - Information to a state or federal entity to conduct studies to improve child and family outcomes, including improving program quality.
 - Information to appropriate parties in order to address a disaster, health or safety emergency during the period of the emergency, or a serious health and safety risk such as a food allergy
 - Information to comply with judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Acts (FERPA)

Head Start programs are subject to both Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). HSPPS provides specific privacy protections for child records within the Head Start program, while FERPA extends privacy protections to educational records for students of all ages who attend schools receiving federal funding. These regulations ensure that Head Start programs handle sensitive information responsibly and protect the privacy of children and families.

Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) | HSPPS includes provisions for parental rights to access and amend child records, ensuring transparency and allowing parents to address any inaccuracies.

Specific Requirements | HSPPS outlines specific requirements for Head Start programs regarding the handling and disclosure of child records, including when consent is needed and when information can be shared without consent.

Coordination with other agencies | HSPPS encourages Head Start programs to participate in coordinated systems with other early childhood programs and state data systems, while also respecting privacy considerations.

Alignment with FERPA | HSPPS privacy protections generally align with FERPA, but also include unique requirements tailored to the specific needs and context of Head Start programs, such as the emphasis on parent involvement and family engagement.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):

Scope | FERPA applies to all educational agencies and institutions that receive funding from the U.S. Department of Education, including Head Start programs if they receive such funding.

Parental Rights | FERPA grants parents the right to inspect and review their child's education records, the right to request amendments to inaccurate or misleading information, and the right to a hearing if their request to amend is denied.

Protection of Information | FERPA prohibits the release of personally identifiable information from a student's education records without parental consent, with certain exceptions, such as disclosures to school officials with a legitimate educational interest.

Enforcement | The U.S. Department of Education's Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO) is responsible for enforcing FERPA, and complaints can be filed with FPCO if a violation is suspected.

Key Differences and Overlap:

Scope and Context | FERPA has a broader scope, encompassing all educational institutions receiving federal funds, while HSPPS is specifically focused on Head Start programs.

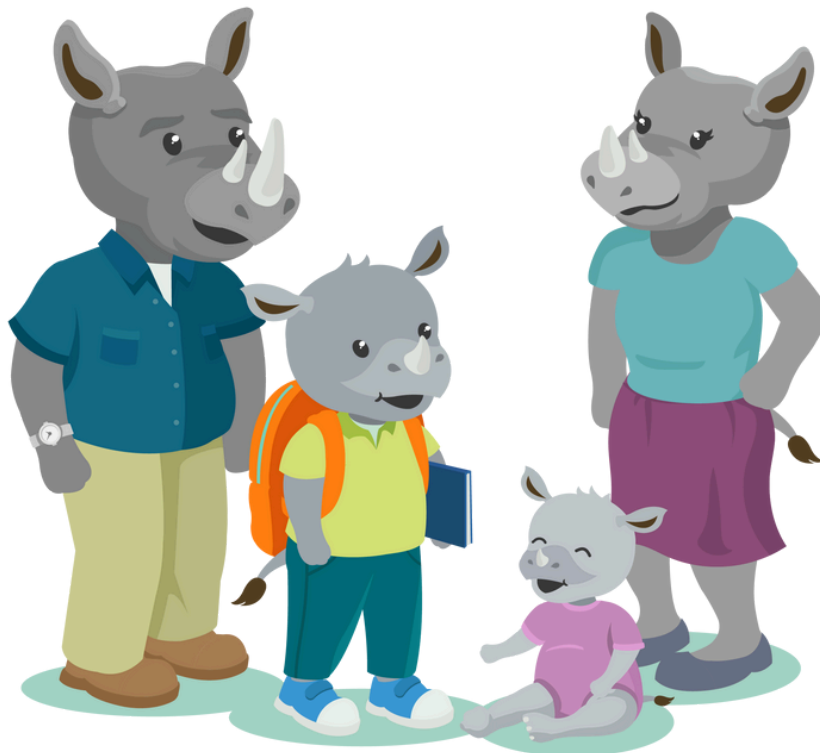
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Acts (FERPA)

Specific Provisions | HSPPS includes more detailed provisions about parent engagement, family partnerships, and coordination with other early childhood programs, reflecting the unique goals and structure of Head Start.

Overlap and Alignment:

Both FERPA and HSPPS aim to protect student privacy, but HSPPS also emphasizes parental involvement and family engagement in the child's education, which is a key component of the Head Start approach.

In essence, Head Start programs must adhere to both the specific privacy guidelines outlined in HSPPS and the broader FERPA regulations, ensuring the protection of children's and families' sensitive information while fostering a strong partnership between families and the program.



Mandated Reporting

Our first priority is the health, safety, and well-being of all the children we serve. In accordance with South Carolina law, all RFS staff are considered mandated reporters. It is the responsibility of each of our staff members to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. Head Start programs are mandated to report specific incidents to ensure child safety and program accountability. These reports include suspected child abuse and neglect, significant incidents affecting child health or safety, and certain legal proceedings related to program operations. Programs must also submit quality improvement plans when deficiencies are identified.

Child Abuse and Neglect | All Early Head Start staff are mandated reporters, legally obligated to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities.

Significant Incidents | Programs must report any significant incident that affects the health or safety of a child, including those requiring closure of classrooms or centers, unauthorized release of a child, or incidents involving potential maltreatment or endangerment by staff, consultants, contractors, or volunteers.

Legal Proceedings | Reports are required for any legal proceedings by any party that are directly related to program operations.

Deficiencies | Programs must submit a quality improvement plan to the responsible HHS official when a deficiency is identified.

Internal Procedures | Programs must have established internal procedures for staff to report incidents, including immediate notification to the program's Regional Office when a staff member or volunteer causes an incident or suspected incident.

Immediate Reporting | Reports of suspected child abuse and neglect should be made immediately to the appropriate child protection agency.

7-Day Reporting | Reports of significant incidents affecting child health or safety must be submitted to the responsible HHS official immediately, but no later than seven calendar days following the incident.

Additional Reporting:

Annual Reports | Programs must also publish and disseminate an annual report that includes a summary of the most recent community assessment.

Data Reporting | Programs are encouraged to utilize data to track progress and reach goals in all program areas, and to inform program planning and service delivery.

These reporting requirements are crucial for maintaining a safe and supportive environment for children in Head Start programs and ensuring the program's overall quality and accountability.

Family Services

The role of the Family Support Advocate (FSA) is to provide support services to all Early Head Start families throughout the program year. The type of support offered includes providing resources, assisting with creating and working towards family goals as well as supporting parents in preparation for kindergarten and school readiness skills for their child. Families can expect ongoing communication from the Family Support Advocate (FSA), and they will schedule Home Visits throughout the year at a convenient time that best fits the needs of the family. FSAs are committed to maintaining privacy and working closely with classroom teaching staff. They are available to offer support as needed.

Who is coming to my home? | Family Support Advocates conduct Home Visits. FSAs complete Home Visit throughout the year to support families towards meeting their goals and provide resources as needed.

Are they going to look around my house? | No, they are not there to inspect your home. They are strictly there to provide support to families. They review the goal(s) established on the Family Partnership Agreement (FPA).

What is the Family Assessment? | The Family Assessment is completed at the first Home Visit. The form is used to gauge the needs of the family and provide appropriate resources. The Family Assessment will be reviewed at each Home Visit.

Why do I have to have Home Visits? | The program's policy requires that the assigned Family Support Advocates (FSAs) complete Home Visits throughout the program year. They will be flexible with scheduling Home Visits which will occur in Fall, Winter, and Spring.

How long is a typical Home Visit? | A typical Home Visit lasts 45 minutes to an hour is for (PAT) Parents as Teachers, and 90 minutes for EHS.

What are we going to talk about? | We will review your goals and discuss the progress your family is making. The assigned Family Support Advocate will share appropriate resources based on the completed Family Assessment.

Does my child have to be present during a Home Visit? | The child doesn't have to be present during a home visit.

Do I have to sign something at every Home Visit? | It is likely that you will sign a form at every Home Visit. The FSA will be reviewing the FPA and the family assessment. There may be additional forms/documents that require a signature

Attendance Policy

Regular attendance is essential to your child's success. Attendance and participation in all aspects of RFS, will maximize the benefits you and your child receive. We understand that life happens; children get sick, cars break down, and obstacles appear. We ask that you make 100% effort to attend all aspects of the program, including daily attendance to the center, home visits, conferences and other activities.. Children who arrive late or leave early miss opportunities for many critical learning experiences.

Our program follows USDA nutrition program guidelines and Head Start Performance Standards, which require us to document daily attendance and the reason for the absences. Please notify the center in advance if your child will be absent. If advance notice is not possible, call the center as soon as you can. For consistency and to maximize learning time, we ask that children arrive no later than 9:30 AM each day. Children arriving after 9:45am without prior notification will not be allowed to attend until the next following school day.

If attendance or chronic tardiness becomes a concern, your Family Support Advocate or the Center Director will work with you to determine the best program option for you and your child. All program options require a high attendance rate (90% and above). If your child is sick and needs to be absent for the day, please contact the center and/or your assigned Family Support Advocate. This process helps the Family Support Advocate and staff monitor what illnesses other children have been exposed to.

Absence Notification

If your child will be absent, please notify the center via phone or the interactive communication portal as soon as possible. You may also leave a signed note in the office. Please remember: it is the parent's responsibility to inform the office directly. Teaching staff are not responsible for passing along absence messages.

Absences are considered excused when there is a phone call from the parent before 9:30am, and on the day of absence. If you do not call, the Center Director or the FSA will call you to inquire about your child's absence.

Arrival and Departure Procedures

- Sign-In and Sign-Out: Parents must sign their child in and out each day.
- Authorized Pick-Up: Please inform staff in advance, and in writing of who will be picking up your child. If someone unfamiliar is picking up, they must present photo identification.
- Safety First
 - Children will not be released to anyone deemed unsafe or unfit to transport them.
 - If someone arrives under the influence of drugs or alcohol, staff will contact local authorities and notify alternate authorized contacts.
- Timely Pick-Up: We kindly ask that children are picked up no later than 3:45 PM, to allow staff time to complete closing duties and exit the center by 4:00 PM. It can be distressing for children to wait after others have gone home.

Late Arrival | Early & Late Pick Up

Late Arrival

Arriving to school at the start time is very important for all children. All children (unless early notification) must arrive between 8:30am - 9:30am every day.

To align with the policy

- Family Support Advocates will document and communicate the policy to the parent/guardians
- If late arrival and/or late pick up continue, Center Director and Family Support Advocate will schedule a parent meeting and provide another copy of the policy
- If late arrival and/or late pick up still continue unresolved, the Program Director will be notified and will schedule a conference with the family to reach a solution to improve attendance, late arrival and/or late pick up
- Chronic absences and tardiness may result in your child missing a day. Continued chronic absences may result in your child transitioning out of our center-based program.

Early | Late Pick Up

We are sensitive to the fact that unforeseen situations occur, but to provide a quality program, we ask that medical appointments and family engagements be scheduled around your child's school day. Please verify early pick-ups in advance with your child's Family Support Advocate. In the event of late pick-up, please contact the center as soon as possible. Children must be picked up no later than 4:00pm. If your child is picked up after 4:00pm, you will receive a "Late Pick-up Notice". Consistent late pick-up is considered neglect. If we haven't heard from you by 4:10pm we will attempt to call you and/or your emergency contact numbers. If we can't reach you (or an emergency contact) by 4:30pm, when all staff are scheduled to leave, we will contact Columbia Police or Department of Social Services as we can't be responsible for your child after that time. After your third "Late Pick-Up Notice." you will be required to conference with the Center Director and the Family Support Advocate.

Arrival

- Parent/escort must sign in with the child(ren) with the teacher upon arrival (to be considered an escort for a child, a person must be at least sixteen years of age AND listed on the Emergency Contact Authorization Form)
- Children should arrive at exactly 8:30am for entrance

Departure

- Parent/escort must pick up their child(ren) at the scheduled departure time, 4:00pm, sharp.
- Only persons listed on the Emergency Contact Form will be allowed to pick up the child(ren). If there is a change in who will pick up the child(ren), the parent must call, and inform in writing, giving permission for their child to be released to that specific person. That person must have a photo ID to show the front office staff before they will be allowed to enter the classroom.
- Emergency Contact Form must be kept up to date for the safety of the child. Please notify the center immediately of any changes. Adding or removing a person from the form must be done in writing, signed and dated by the parent/guardian.

Inclement Weather, Transportation & Dress Code

Inclement Weather |

In the event of inclement weather, both center-based and home-based programs will follow South Carolina state offices for delayed start, early release and closing.

Any home-based families who have Home Visit scheduled on these days will be contacted by their Family Support Advocate to confirm the cancellation or change in appointment time. Families should tune into the local radio, TV, and/or check our website (www.richlandfirststeps.org) for reports of delays or closings.

Transportation |

No transportation is provided. City bus services are available and are easily accessible from each of our center locations. Additional information, such as bus line information and fees, can be provided upon request.

Transportation of children and/or parents by RFS staff is NOT permitted for any reason. If your family needs assistance with transportation, your Family Support Advocate can help link you to community resources.

Dress Code |

Please think of your child's comfort when dressing him or her for center-based care. Keep in mind that the children work with messy activities and spend time daily on the playground, so dress them in comfortable clothing that is easily washed. All extra clothing should be labeled with your child's name. For the children's safety, no open-toed shoes are allowed. All shoes should be fastened securely to the child's feet. If your child wears beads in their hair, please make sure all the beads are secure. Loose beads can be choking hazard for children and increase the likelihood of falls in the classroom. Please do not allow children to wear dangling earrings or necklaces as these items can cause injuries. Other items or accessories that cause disruption or safety concerns will be prohibited.

Materials |

All materials needed for participation in the program are provided. The only thing you need to send with your child is a complete change of clothing (if possible) and any security item the child may have such as a pacifier or a special blanket. Children are discouraged from bringing personal belongings, food, or money to school.

No toy guns, matches, knives, or toys with sharp edges are permitted. NO bags may be left in the classroom. Adults may not bring any items into the center or classroom (including food) without administrative approval.

Diapers, wipes, formula, snacks, and meals, and learning materials are all provided at the center. A licensed medical pediatrician's note may be required if specific materials or a substitution are needed.

If your family is in need of basic items, such as food, clothing, diapering, wipes, or furniture, your assigned Family Support Advocate can assist you in securing these items.

Cell Phone Policy, Code of Conduct | SISO

A typical early childhood center cell phone policy restricts personal cell phone use by staff during classroom time, prioritizing the safety and attention of children. Policies often mandate that cell phones remain off or on silent, stored away from the classroom, and used only during designated breaks, outside the presence of children, or in emergencies with appropriate precautions.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

Key Aspects of a Childcare Cell Phone Policy:

- **Classroom Prohibition:** Personal cell phone use is generally not permitted inside classrooms, ensuring staff focus remains on the children.
- **Designated Use Areas:** Staff may be allowed to use their phones during breaks, outside the classroom, and away from children.
- **Emergency Procedures:** In emergencies, one staff member per group may carry a phone for communication, but only for urgent situations.
- **Silent/Vibrate Mode:** Personal cell phones should be on silent or vibrate mode to minimize distractions.
- **Work-Related Use:** Phone use for work-related tasks (e.g., taking photos for documentation, accessing schedules) might be permitted with specific guidelines.
- **Training and Awareness:** All staff should be trained on the policy and understand its rationale.
- **Parent Communication:** The policy should address how parents can reach staff in emergencies.
- **Enforcement:** The policy should be consistently enforced and reviewed regularly.

Why these policies exist:

- **Child Safety:** Prioritizing children's safety and supervision is paramount.
- **Staff Focus:** Minimizing distractions allows staff to fully engage with the children.
- **Professionalism:** Restricting cell phone use demonstrates professionalism and a commitment to children's well-being.
- **Legal and Regulatory Compliance:** Some policies may be mandated by state or local regulations.

Code of Conduct | At RFS, we expect all families to conduct themselves properly. Aggressive, abusive, or threatening behavior is not allowed and will not be tolerated. This type of unacceptable behavior may threaten your child's continued enrollment in the program.

Signing In & Out | Each center has a procedure in place to sign your child in and out each day. All children must be accompanied by an adult into the classroom. Please talk with your child's teacher and/or Family Support Advocate when you arrive and each afternoon when you pick up your child. This conversation is an important part of sharing daily information about your child and his or her day.

Field Trip, Swimming & Smoke-Free Policy

Field Trips | RFS do not take children on any field trips. We do not transport children and/or families

Swimming | RFS does not provide opportunities for enrolled children to swim during program hours

Sunscreen | Too much exposure to UV rays may increase children's risk of getting skin cancer someday, which is why we have a policy requiring children wearing sunscreen on exposed skin, including but not limited to the face (except eyelids), tops of ears, nose, bare shoulders, arms, and legs. During drop-off, parents will apply sunscreen to their child. Center-based staff will reapply before going out in the afternoon

Smoke Free and Scent Free Policy

Head Start Performance Standards address both smoke-free and scent-free environments to protect the health and safety of children, families, and staff.

Smoke-free Environment:

- **Prohibition of Smoking:** Smoking is prohibited in any indoor facility used for Head Start services for children under 18, including centers and leased spaces.
- **Outdoor Smoke-free Zones:** Smoking is prohibited in the play yard and must be at least 20 feet away from openings into interior spaces that children access.
- **Promoting Smoke-free Homes:** Head Start programs are required to provide families with information about the dangers of secondhand smoke exposure and how to protect their children.

Scent-free Environment:

- **Sensitivity and Allergies:** Head Start recognizes that some children and staff may have sensitivities or allergies to certain fragrances or scents, which can make the learning environment difficult or impossible.
- **Reducing Exposure:** Programs aim to minimize exposure to strong odors and fragrances by:
 - Using fragrance-free cleaning products whenever possible.
 - Controlling strong odors through ventilation rather than air fresheners.
 - Discouraging staff from wearing strong perfumes or scented products.
- **Maintaining a Fragrance-free Workspace:** Some resources recommend implementing fragrance-free policies and promoting the use of fragrance-free products within Early Head Start facilities.

Overall Goal: The overarching goal of these standards is to create a safe, healthy, and accessible environment for all individuals involved in Head Start programs. Minimizing exposure to smoke and strong scents helps to prevent health issues like asthma attacks, respiratory problems, and other adverse reactions.

Non-Discrimination Policy | In accordance with Federal law, this institute is prohibited from discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitman Building, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964 (voice and TDD)

Health & Health Related Absences

Health

Requirements for Enrollment

- Immunizations | All children entering Early Head Start must have an updated medical physical, shot record and assigned medical doctor and dentist before they can start receiving our services.
- Annual Medical Exam | Each child must have an annual medical examination. Early Head Start will provide the form for this examination. The form must be completed, signed, and dated by a licensed pediatrician and to the program.
- Early Head Start Annual Dental Exam | Each child enrolled in Early Head Start is required to have an annual dental exam
- Morning Health Checks | Each child enrolled in Early Head Start is required to have a daily health check completed by the teaching staff and/or Family Support Advocate (home-based) upon arrival. Morning Health Checks are required for all children to identify potential illness or other health concerns. These checks are a quick way to observe a child's physical condition and behavior for any signs of illness or injury. Teaching staff and Family Support Advocates are responsible for conducting these checks and documenting any concerns on a daily health check form

Health Related Absences

Your child should stay home if they are sick, so they do not expose other children and staff, and so they can get needed rest.

Parents are required to inform the center director and/or Family Support Advocate if their child will be absent. You will receive a call if we do not know why your child is absent.

Your child will not be able to attend if any of the following symptoms are present:

- A temperature over 100.4 degrees. If your child feels warm or is complaining about being warm, take their temperature. To return, the child must be fever-free for 24 hours and without the use of fever reducing medication like Tylenol or Ibuprofen
- A rash or other suspected contagious disease. Any rash or illness should be diagnosed by a licensed pediatrician. If a child is sent home with a rash or suspected contagious disease, a note from the licensed pediatrician will be required before the child can return.
- A sore throat. A sore throat lasting more than 24 hours should be examined by a licensed pediatrician.
- A persistent cough that won't stop or other problems with breathing
- A draining red/pink eye. A child will not be able to return without a medical note from a licensed pediatrician
- Vomited and/or diarrhea in the last 24 hours. A child must be symptom-free for 24 hours before they can return
- Evidence of head lice

If a child comes to the program with any of the above symptoms, the child will be separated from the other children, and the parent/guardian will be contacted immediately to pick up the child within 30 minutes. Children actively enrolled in our Early Head Start program should not attend family events, and socialization if demonstrating any of these symptoms. If you have any questions regarding whether your child should stay home for health-related reasons, please contact your assigned Family Support Advocate.

Morning Health Checks Overview:

Health

The Office of Head Start - Head Start Performance Standards require morning health checks to identify illness or other health concerns in children. These checks involve observing the child's appearance, behavior, and listening for complaints or unusual sounds. Staff should document any concerns and follow program policies for exclusion and follow-up care. Your child's health is very important to us. When you and your child arrive at the classroom setting each morning, your child's teacher will perform a required morning health check. We are checking to be sure that your child is free from injury or illness and is in good health and ready to participate in activities. This conversation between parent and teacher helps to prepare for the child's day at the center. Expect to hear questions such as:

- How did your child sleep last night?
- Did your child have any medication this morning?
- How is your child feeling this morning? (sad? happy? excited?)

Early identification of illness: Morning health checks help identify signs of illness early, allowing for prompt intervention and preventing further spread of illness.

Ensuring child safety: By identifying potential health concerns, morning health checks help ensure the safety and well-being of all children in the program.

Promoting healthy habits: Morning health checks can also be an opportunity to reinforce healthy habits like hand washing and to educate families about illness prevention.

Supporting attendance: By identifying and addressing health concerns early, morning health checks can help reduce absenteeism and promote regular attendance.

Key aspects of daily health checks in Head Start:

Observation: Staff observe the child's overall appearance, looking for signs of illness like rashes, unusual coloring, or discharge from eyes or nose.

Behavior: Staff note any changes in behavior, such as unusual sleepiness, irritability, or lack of appetite.

Communication: Staff should communicate with the child and their family to gather information about how the child is feeling and any recent injuries or illnesses.

Documentation: Any concerns or observations should be documented on a daily health check form and retained for at least 30 days.

Follow-up: If concerns are identified, staff should follow the program's procedures for exclusion from the program and for follow-up care, including referrals to medical professionals.

Hand washing: Staff should wash their hands before and after each health check.

Respectful interaction: Health checks should be conducted in a way that is respectful of the child's body and feelings.

Head Checks: Weekly head checks for lice are also required by some programs.

Handwashing Procedure

Head Start Performance Standards, specifically § 1302.47 (b) (6), emphasize the importance of handwashing to prevent the spread of infections in early childhood education settings. All Head Start staff, volunteers, visitors, and children are expected to follow established handwashing procedures. These procedures include washing hands with soap and water after specific activities, such as toileting, diapering, before and after meals, and after handling bodily fluids or potentially contaminated items.

Mandatory Handwashing: Mandates handwashing after specific activities to minimize the risk of spreading infections.

Staff and Child Responsibility: Parents, staff, volunteers, and children are all expected to follow the handwashing guidelines.

Timing and Frequency: Handwashing is required before and after food preparation, handling, or serving, after toileting or diapering, after handling pets or other animals, and after coughing or sneezing.

Proper Technique: Hands should be washed with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, using friction, rinsed well, and dried thoroughly with a single-use paper towel.

Accessibility and Resources: Clear handwashing procedures should be posted in classrooms and alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not to be used due to the risk of alcohol toxicity in young children. Non-alcohol based sanitizers may be used as an exception when running water and soap are not available.



Attendance, Communicable Disease, Sick Children & Medication

Health Services to Promote Attendance |

From the first day of enrollment, a young child's attendance matters! Good attendance leads to lifelong learning and positive habits. Getting into a schedule of regular attendance starts early. If young children miss many days in preschool, they are more likely to have attendance issues in elementary school. Others may drop out as they get older. Children don't get to take advantage of all the available chances to learn.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing one or more school days out of 10 for any reason. In kindergarten, and even pre-K, chronic absenteeism can predict lower test scores and poor attendance and retention in later grades, especially if the problem persists for more than a year.

Sick Child Exclusion |

As a licensed DSS child care facilities, our center-based programs are required to follow the sick-child exclusion list published by DHEC each year. The complete policy can be found by visiting South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control website at www.scdhec.gov

Communicable Disease | Teaching and Family Support staff perform daily health checks on each child every day. If signs of a communicable disease or other illness are observed, the parent will be asked to take their child home immediately. Signs observed may include: fever, rash, diarrhea, vomiting, head lice, pink eye, impetigo, or ringworm. Head lice, scabies, pink eye, impetigo, or ringworm must be treated by a licensed medical pediatrician. A child must be free of any symptoms before returning to services. Evidence of treatment must be submitted to the assigned Family Support Advocate.

Procedure for Sick Children |

Whenever a child becomes ill at the center and needs to go home, a Sick Child Observation Form must be completed.

- A Sick Child Observation Form will be completed when staff observe any sign of illness. Before a child is sent home due to illness, the child's temperature is taken and recorded on the form. The Family Support Advocate or Center Director must review and sign off on the form. Children will be sent home or not allowed to stay for a fever over 100.4 degrees, episodes of vomiting, diarrhea, or appears too ill to participate in center activities
- Family Support Advocate and/or Center Director will contact the parent/guardian for immediate child pick-up. Both notification time and child pick up time will be documented on the form. Signature of the Family Support Advocate, Center Director and pick-up parent/guardian must be on the form. A copy is distributed to the parent/guardian and a copy is placed in the child's file
- If a child is being sent home for a rash, head lice, scabies, pink eye, impetigo or ringworm, parents will be asked to follow up with a licensed medical pediatrician and verify proper treatment of illness before the child can return. Documentation will be required.

Medication Administration |

The parent and pediatrician must complete and sign an Administration of Medication form whenever a parent/guardian wishes to have center staff administer medication to their child.

NOTE: Only pediatrician authorized medication will be administered in the center

After the parent/guardian has brought the medication and the Administration of Medication form, the Health/Disabilities Coordinator will meet with the parent/guardian, Family Support Advocate and teaching staff to instruct them in administering the medication. No medication will be administered until the meeting has taken place. Many medications have side effects; therefore, it is helpful for staff to be aware of any medications your child may be taking at home.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

RFS participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), a Federal program that provides healthy meals and snacks to children enrolled in our program.

Each day more than 2.6 million children participate in CACFP at childcare homes, and Early Learning child care centers across the country. Providers are reimbursed for serving nutritious meals and snacks which meet USDA requirements. The program plays a vital role in improving the quality of Early Child Care facilities and making it more affordable for low-income families.

Breakfast	Lunch or Supper	Snacks (2 of the 4 groups)
Low Fat Milk Fresh Fruit, Fruit cup, 100% juice Grain / Bread product	Low Fat Milk Meat/meat alternate Grain or bread product Vegetable (2 different vegetables can be substituted for a fruit) Fruit	Low Fat Milk Meat/meat alternate Grain or bread product Vegetable Fruit

Eligibility | State agencies reimburse facilities that offer non-residential child care to the following children:

- Children 12 and under
- Migrant children 15 and under
- People with disabilities regardless of their age
- In after-school programs and emergency shelters, children up to age 18
- Adults who are functionally impaired or over age 60

Contact Information | If you have questions about CACFP, please contact one of the following

Samm Truesdale RFS Health/Disability Coordinator	Licensed Dietician	South Carolina Early Care & Learning - CACFP Program Toll-Free: (888) 834-8096 Main Line: (803) 898-0959 Monitoring: (803) 898-0971
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Non-discrimination Policy

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

mail:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
fax:

(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or

email:

program.intake@usda.gov

Family Style Dining, Food Allergies, Snacks & Treats

Family style dining encourages learning and development before, during, and after mealtimes. This tip sheet describes the benefits of family style dining. It also provides practical tips on how to support it in an early childhood education program. Mealtime is a social affair of Early Head Start. It is an opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation with small groups. The children learn table manners and skills used at mealtime, such as passing food, serving themselves, and using a napkin and utensils properly. They are learning to estimate their hunger level.

Food Allergies | If your child has any food and/or seasonal allergies, please inform all support (Intake Coordinator, Health/Disabilities Coordinator, assigned Family Support Advocate, and the Center Director). Written documentation and instructions from a licensed medical pediatrician will be required. The RFS Early Head Start program will provide substitution for any child who has a food allergy.

In addition to the nutritional focus of mealtimes, the environment is important to a child's well-being. Snack and mealtimes are viewed as an opportunity for learning and developing good manners, healthy habits, socialization skills, self-help skills, decision-making skills, and communication skills. We don't want this rich instructional time to pass us by. Parents are encouraged to observe mealtimes and replicate the environment in their homes.

Nut Free Policy | We currently have children attending our centers who are extremely allergic to nuts and nut products. Vigilance with hand washing and hygiene are critical. Nut products include, but are not limited to, items such as peanut butter, peanut butter candy or mix treats, Almond milk and more.

Meals and Snacks | The RFS participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), a Federal program that provides healthy meals and snacks to the children we serve. This food program is a vital part of your child's educational process. Studies show a strong link between good nutrition and education. The CACFP meal requirements are established by the USDA.

Catering | All meals and snacks provided by the program will be catered by Dupre's Catering and Events. They are approved for preparation and transportation of food. Early Head Start provides cups, plates, and utensils which are washed and sanitized between each use. Portions are served according to the USDA guidelines for the child's age. As is available, seconds are offered to the children. Please note that real fruit, not fruit juice, is served two times a day to meet the fruit requirement. Processed juices are not served. We also make water readily available for all children in the center-based program.

Food Experiences | Young children are sometimes reluctant to try new foods. Studies show it takes 7 - 10 times for a child to acquire a taste for something new and different. While no child is ever forced to eat or to clean their plate, they are encouraged to try a bite of the different foods on their plate. Parents are often surprised that their child will eat foods at our center that he/she refuses to eat at home. Often it can be seeing their friends try and enjoy new foods. Our goal is to offer our young children an opportunity to try a large variety of new and different foods in a relaxed and enjoyable setting. We are committed to providing your child with safe and healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime.

Treats | Some parents have expressed a desire to bring treats to the center on their child's birthday or a holiday. There are a growing number of young children with serious food allergies. We cannot protect the children from allergic reactions unless we know exactly what is in every food item served, and it is for that reason we do not authorize/permit families to bring in food from the outside. We ask that you bring in non-edible treats (no food). We suggest things such as stickers, pencils, erasers, bubbles, etc.

Early Head Start | Center & Daily Schedule

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 childcare 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 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.

Daily Schedule | Each child develops at his/her own rate. Quality care for young children means providing routines and predictability in a structured, but child-focused environment. Your child's day in the center will include:

- Arrival and welcome, including Morning Health Checks, and Hand-washing
- Family Style Dining
- Diaper changing | toileting
- Tooth Brushing
- Indoor and outdoor play
- Sleeping | Nap-time | Rest time
- Departure

Teachers follow the child's lead in determining when routines occur. As one child eats and falls asleep, another may wake up and show signs of being hungry. An infant in the classroom may take several short naps during the day, while an older toddler may take only one longer one. The classroom routines will allow flexibility to meet the needs of all children and their developmental stages. Each classroom has a daily routine posted.

Hours of Operation

Hours of Operation |

Monday through Friday: 8:30 AM – 4:00 PM (sharp)

Daily Schedule

- 8:30 AM – 9:00 AM: Breakfast
- 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM: Educational Instructional Time
- 10:30am - 11:00am: Outdoor Time
- 11:00 AM – 12:00PM: Lunch (handwashing, teeth brushing and preparing for nap/rest time)
- 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM: Rest/Nap Time
- 2:00 PM – 2:30 PM: Snack
- 2:30PM - 3:00PM: Outdoor Time
- 3:00PM - 3:30PM: Closing circle & End of day wrap
- 4:00 PM: Dismissal

Transition Planning |

Specific plans for transitions (e.g., arrival, departure, moving between locations) are crucial to prevent children from being left unsupervised.

Staff Responsibility |

All staff, including teachers, assistants, and volunteers, are responsible for ensuring children are not left alone or unsupervised.

Continuity of Care |

Maintaining consistent caregivers for individual children, especially in Early Head Start, is a priority.

Systems-Thinking Approach |

Programs should have a comprehensive approach to child safety and supervision, considering all aspects of their operations.

Communication |

Open communication between staff, families, and leadership is essential for ensuring child safety.

ASQ's | Child Screening | Assessment

Head Start Performance Standards require that all developmental and social – emotional screenings be completed within 45 days of a child's enrollment.

Expectations | During the first 45 days of each program year, RFS staff will provide you with the ASQ questionnaires that match your child's age.

- You will be asked to complete the questionnaires to the best of your ability and knowledge
- Return the completed forms to your
 - Child's teaching staff
 - Center Director
 - Family Support Advocate
- The process applies to both center and home-based programs

Child Screenings | Various screenings will be confirmed with the parent/guardian of the child within the first 45 days of his or her enrollment. These include:

- Hearing
- Vision
- Health and Nutrition

Child Assessment | RFS uses Teaching Strategies - GOLD for ongoing child assessment in the Early Head Start and Home-based program. Teaching Strategies - GOLD is a curriculum-based assessment that looks at each child's development in all areas, independently as well as his or her overall development. The checklist aligns with Creative Curriculum and is completed for each child three times a year. Results are shared with parents both verbally and in writing. If concerns are present, the health and education team will discuss the option of focusing goals on a particular area or making a referral for further assessment

We thank you for your commitment to your child's early learning journey. By participating in the ASQ screening process, you're helping ensure that your child – and every child in our program gets the strongest start possible.

Why does the Ages and Stages Questionnaire Matter?

Studies show that high-quality early childhood programs, such as Head Start and Early Head Start, have a significant impact on young children and their families. These programs not only support healthy development but also help improve a child's long-term success in school. The ASQ's are an essential tool that helps our agency live up to this promise.

Whether your child(ren) is enrolled in a center-based or home-based program. ASQ questionnaires support our ability to deliver comprehensive child development services while meeting the rigorous requirement of the Head Start Performance Standards.

What is ASQ?

The ASQ system includes:

- ASQ-3 | A developmental screener that helps assess communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem-solving, and personal – social skills
- ASQ-SE – 2 | A social – emotional screener that identifies concerns related to self-regulation, compliance, communication, adaptive behaviors, and more.

Both Screeners are:

- Culturally sensitive
- Parent -completed
- Age-appropriate
- Refined based on real user feedback to ensure all parents-regardless of background, can participate accurately and meaningfully

Importance | ASQ is more than a screening tool – it is a partnership between parents and staff, fostering a shared understanding of each child's developmental journey.

Benefits include:

- Helping parents learn about developmental milestones
- Providing feedback about a child's strength and areas of growth
- Promoting early intervention when needed
- Supporting ongoing parent engagement and education

The information gathered through ASQ:

- Helps teachers and staff plan individualized learning experiences
- Ensures compliance with the Office of Head Start requirements
- Strengthens partnerships with families by sharing progress and resources

Positive Discipline Overview

The Head Start Performance Standards emphasize positive guidance and support for children's behavior, rather than punitive measures. Suspension and expulsion are heavily restricted, and any temporary suspension must be a last resort after interventions and support are tried. We are required to consult with mental health professionals and collaborate with our parents before considering suspension.

Key Principles:

Positive Guidance:

Our programs focus on modeling positive behaviors, using conscious discipline techniques, and providing opportunities for children to resolve conflicts.

Behavior as Communication:

Head Start recognizes that all behavior is a form of communication and should be addressed with respect and kindness.

Prevention and Early Intervention:

The standards encourage anticipating children's behavior, creating supportive environments, and providing early intervention services to address potential challenges.

Suspension and Expulsion:

Limited Use: Suspension and expulsion are allowed only in limited circumstances, and temporary suspensions are a last resort.

Serious Safety Threat:

A temporary suspension may only be used when a serious safety threat exists that hasn't been addressed through other interventions.

Consultation and Collaboration:

Before suspension, our program must consult with a mental health professional, collaborate with parents, and explore other community resources.

Re-entry Support:

We must help children return to full participation as quickly as possible and ensure their safety during the transition.

Additional Requirements

Staff Conduct:

All staff, volunteers, and contractors must follow a code of conduct that prohibits abusive or neglectful behavior towards children.

Mental Health Services | Programs must ensure access to mental health consultation and support services for children and families.

Documentation | Suspension plans and reentry plans must be thoroughly documented.

Positive Discipline Overview

RFS ensures all staff, consultants, contractors and volunteers abide by the program's standard of conduct. This states that staff, consultants, contractors and volunteers must not endanger the health and safety of the children we serve and must not:

- Use corporal punishment
- Use isolation to discipline a child
- Bind or tie a child to restrict movement or tape a child's mouth
- Use or withhold food as a punishment or reward
- Use toilet learning/training methods that punish, demean, or humiliation, rejecting, terrorizing, extended ignoring, or corrupting a child
- Physically abuse a child
- Use any form of verbal abuse, including profane, sarcastic language, threats, or derogatory remarks about the child or child's family
- Use physical activity or outdoor time as a punishment or reward
- Leave children alone or unsupervised

The use of any of these practices may be grounds for immediate termination of staff, consultants, contractors, and volunteers.

At RFS, our staff are trained and coached to **guide children's behavior** in a developmentally appropriate and supportive way. As a child's first teacher, **parents and guardians play a vital role** in shaping and reinforcing this guidance at home.

Understanding and practicing positive behavior guidance helps to mold and shape children into respectful, confident, and emotionally secure individuals.

Key Components to Remember:

- Model Respectful Behavior - Children learn by example
- Set Clear and Consistent Expectations - Predictability builds security
- Encourage Positive Choices - Focus on what children can do
- Guide, Don't Punish - redirect behaviors rather than react harshly
- Collaborate with Educators - stay in communication with your child's teaching team

Together, we can create nurturing environments where children thrive emotionally, socially, and academically.

Transition Services

Our Early Head Start program supports children and families during the transition time into and out of our program. Early Head Start staff will support children and families as they adjust to participating in our Early Head Start program. When your child is 2 1/2 - years old, the assigned Family Support Advocate will begin preparing the child and family for the next educational steps. Some suggestions for next steps would be Head Start, private early childcare centers, family childcare centers, and/or faith-based centers. As your child's advocate, please know that they will not be transitioned out of the program without a thoughtful, documented plan in place. We are committed to ensuring a smooth and successful transition from the RFS program to their next preschool destination.

The Family Support Advocate will be with you and support you through the transition. During the process we will help parents find and decide on the most appropriate preschool setting for their child. The transition planning process includes parents and everyone from EHS who work directly with the child. Others, such as therapists or other service providers, may be included as well.

As young children enter preschool, it is common for them to demonstrate some separation and adjustment behaviors. Most of these behaviors disappear after a short time with the family and staff working together to support the child. If these behaviors do not resolve themselves, we may:

- Discuss strategies to help ease the transition for your child
- Call you immediately if behavior poses a safety threat to him/her or others in the classroom
- Schedule a conference to discuss options



Disability Services

Head Start programs are required to serve children with disabilities and ensure at least 10% of their enrollment is filled by children eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

These programs provide comprehensive services, including educational, medical, and social support, tailored to the individual needs of children with disabilities and their families. If your child is already being served by BabyNet or the school district when they enroll with RFS, we will ask the family to share information with us on the services that they are receiving.

The goal will be to enhance the services a family is already receiving, not to duplicate them. If a staff member suspects that an enrolled child has a developmental delay, the staff member is obligated to report it to BabyNet. The staff members will also discuss their concerns with the child's family. If the family is willing, the staff member will help them to schedule a more in-depth observation and assessment of their child.

RFS staff will help the family receive the necessary services and will participate in planning and therapy as requested by the family.

Key Aspects of Head Start Performance Standards for Special Needs:

Enrollment Requirement | As an Early Head Start program we must reserve a minimum of 10% of their enrollment slots for children with disabilities who are eligible for IDEA services.

Comprehensive Services | Programs are expected to offer a range of services, including:

Outreach | Actively seeking out and enrolling children with disabilities.

Collaboration | Working with other agencies, such as those providing special education and health services, to ensure coordinated support.

Individualized Support | Developing and implementing individualized education programs (IEPs) or individualized family service plans (IFSPs) to address each child's unique needs.

Parental Involvement | Engaging parents as active partners in their child's education and providing them with resources and support to advocate for their child's needs.

Transition Support | Our Early Head Start program will collaborate with families and relevant agencies to ensure smooth transitions for children with disabilities as they move from Early Head Start to Head Start, and from Head Start to kindergarten.

Meeting Individual Needs | Our program must provide an inclusive environment that supports children's individual rates of development, languages, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles.

Focus on School Readiness | Our Early Head Start program aims to prepare children with disabilities for success in school and later life by developing their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills.

We provide support to teachers and families through the following services:

- Review of screening completed/Team Record Review with program's team
- Classroom and Home-based observations
- Additional screening requested by parents and staff
- Speech/language and mental health resources
- Crisis intervention and behavior tracking
- Classroom and home activities | interventions as needed
- We will link families and children with community mental health services

Mental Health and Wellness

Mental Health and Wellness | The Office of Head Start places a strong emphasis on mental health, requiring programs to adopt a comprehensive, integrated approach to support children, families, and staff. This involves promoting mental wellness, preventing mental health concerns, and ensuring access to appropriate treatment when needed, often through a multidisciplinary team.

Here's a more detailed look at the key aspects:

1. Holistic Approach:

- The Head Start Performance standards emphasize the interconnection of mental, social, and emotional well-being with overall child development and school readiness.
- They encourage us to integrate mental health support into all aspects of service delivery, including family engagement and staff wellness.

2. Mental Health Consultation:

- At RFS, we are mandated to provide regular mental health consultation services.
- This consultation involves the Mental Wellness & Social Development Coach working with the program's staff and parents to address individual child needs, promote mental wellness, and utilize community resources.

3. Screening and Early Intervention:

- We are required to provide proactive screenings, and follow-up for children's mental health needs.
- This allows for early identification of potential concerns and timely intervention, ensuring children receive appropriate support as early as possible.

4. Strengthening Family Partnerships:

- The standards emphasize the importance of collaborating with families to understand each child's unique needs, temperament, and cultural context.
- This collaboration helps in developing individualized strategies for supporting children's mental health and well-being.

5. Staff Wellness:

- The standards also address staff well-being, recognizing that healthy and supported staff are crucial for providing high-quality services.
- Programs are required to provide staff with information about mental health, wellness, and health education, as well as opportunities for breaks and support.

6. Continuous Improvement:

- The Performance Standards are designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing programs to tailor their approaches to meet the specific needs of our community.
- We are expected to regularly review our mental health services to ensure they are effective and meet the needs of children, families, and staff.

Mental Health and Wellness

Head Start Performance Standards emphasize the importance of mental health and wellness for children, families, and staff, integrating these supports throughout program services.

The standards require a multidisciplinary approach, focusing on promotion, prevention, and early identification and treatment of mental health concerns. This includes mental health consultation, family engagement, and staff well-being initiatives.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

For Children:

Mental health promotion: Our Early Head Start program is designed to foster children's social and emotional development, including their ability to express and regulate emotions, form relationships, explore, and learn.

Prevention and early identification: The program is required to implement practices that reduce the likelihood of mental health disorders and support early identification of concerns through screenings and referrals.

Intervention and treatment: When needed, our program will provide access to mental health treatment and support services.

Collaboration and communication with parents: Parents are involved in supporting their child's mental health and well-being and are provided with information and resources on mental health topics.

For Families: Our Early Head Start program aims to support the overall well-being of families, including their physical and mental health, access to resources, and opportunities for advancement.

Parent and Child Relationship: Nurturing and responsive relationships between parents and children are a core component of Head Start's approach to mental health.

Family Services

- RFS offers support services related to health, nutrition, and mental health, working with parents to promote positive outcomes for children.
- Mental Health and Wellness Resources
- The program will make mental health and wellness information available to staff and provide opportunities for training and education.
- By implementing these standards, we aim to create a program-wide culture of wellness that supports the mental health and well-being of all individuals involved in the program.
- We will link families and children with the Richland County School District, special education personnel, BabyNet, South Carolina Early Intervention for Early Head Start (Birth - Age 3), if there is a suspected disability or delay.

Program Safety

HSPPS §1302.47 |

This section of the standards specifically addresses emergency preparedness, requiring programs to establish procedures for emergencies, fire prevention and response, and protection from contagious diseases.

Review and Revision |

Emergency preparedness plans should be reviewed and updated regularly, incorporating lessons learned from drills and actual events.

Community Partnerships |

Collaborating with local emergency management agencies and other community partners is essential for effective emergency preparedness.

Health Services |

The standards also address child-specific health care needs, including food allergies and medication administration, and require accessible plans of action for emergencies related to these needs.

Fire and Emergency Drills |

Fire and emergency drills are held monthly. Fire and emergency directions are posted in each classroom and the hallways of your child's center. A first aid kit is available in each classroom and every staff member is certified in CPR and First Aid. Each center and the main office has a regulated and licensed mounted AED machine. Specific safety rules are followed by the children and staff to maintain a safe classroom environment. Inspection reports are posted in each center's office. During Socialization, safety procedures must be followed. Fire and emergency directions are posted and available in the facility that we are utilizing for socialization. Specific safety rules are followed by the children and staff to maintain a safe environment. All staff are certified in CPR/First Aid.

Emergency Response Plan |

An Emergency Response Plan is posted. This plan provides guidelines for response in a variety of situations, such as environmental hazards or spills, bomb threats, severe weather, etc. The plan is reviewed yearly by all agency staff. If you would like to review this plan, please ask the Center Director for a copy.

Early Childhood Emergencies |

If a child becomes ill or if an emergency arises, the child's parent/guardian will be notified. If the parent/guardian can't be reached, the emergency contacts identified on the Emergency Contact Authorization Form will be notified. If phone numbers, email addresses or emergency contacts change during the program year, please inform your Family Support Advocate and Center Director.

Fire and Safety Evacuation |

In accordance with DSS standards, center-based will conduct monthly fire drills. An emergency exit diagram will be posted in each classroom and the main office

Additional Resources

- The Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) provide detailed guidance on emergency preparedness requirements.
- The Emergency Preparedness Manual for Early Childhood Programs offers practical advice and tools for developing and implementing a comprehensive plan.
- Caring for Our Children (CFOC) provides national recommendations for health and safety in early childhood settings, which can be helpful in developing emergency preparedness plans.

Emergency Preparedness | Head Start programs are required to have comprehensive emergency preparedness plans that align with the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS). These plans must address a range of potential emergencies, including evacuations, relocation, shelter-in-place procedures, and lockdown protocols, as well as communication and reunification strategies. The plans should also consider the specific needs of all children, including infants, toddlers, children with disabilities, and those with chronic medical conditions.

Key Components of a Head Start Emergency Preparedness Plan

Emergency Procedures |

Programs must establish and follow procedures for various emergencies, including fire, severe weather, and other potential hazards.

Evacuation and Relocation |

Plans should detail procedures for evacuating children and staff to safe locations, including both initial and backup relocation sites.

Shelter-in-Place and Lockdown |

Procedures should be in place for sheltering in place (remaining inside due to a hazard outside) or implementing lockdown (securing the facility due to an immediate threat inside).

Communication and Reunification |

Plans must outline how families will be contacted and how children will be safely reunited with their parents or guardians.

Training and Drills |

Regular training and drills (e.g., fire drills, severe weather drills) are crucial for ensuring staff and children know how to respond to emergencies.

Emergency Kits |

Programs need to maintain well-stocked emergency kits with food, water, first-aid supplies, and other necessary items.

Family Engagement

Communication is an integral part of building relationships between families and staff. By working together, we can prepare children to be successful and ready for school. At RFS, we offer parents many options to communicate with administrative staff, teaching staff, and EHS Family Support Advocates. The intention is that all interactions between families and staff are positive and respectful. Your child's teacher and Family Support Advocate will share with you each day about your child. Be ready to listen, talk, and share information.

Here are some ways parents and staff can communicate with one another:

- Interactive Online communication system
- Parent/Teacher Conferences
- Socializations
- Home Visits
- Policy Council and committee meetings
- Emails, Phone Calls and Text messages
- Flyers & Newsletters
- Office of Head Start website
- Social Media - Facebook page

Partnership Opportunities

Partnering with families is the cornerstone of our Early Head Start Program. Our program is committed to developing partnerships with families. Early Head Start teaching staff, Family Support Advocates, and Content Leadership form this partnership by visiting each family's home multiple times during the program year.

Parents can also become more involved by:

- Visiting the classroom as an observer or volunteer. Participating in Early Head Start socializations.
- Participating in Family Engagement events, male engagement events, parent workshops and/or community-based projects
- Working with their child with home-on-home curriculum activities through Parent As Teachers (PAT) provided by Early Head Start Family Support Advocates
- Participating in Home Visits, parent/teacher conferences with your teaching staff and assigned Family Support Advocate
- Participating in weekly Home Visits with your Family Support Advocate through Home-based services
- Participating in parent committee meetings that take place in the classroom in the Fall, Winter, and Spring
- Serving as a Representative or alternate on the Policy Council

Communication

Communication is an integral part of building relationships between parents and staff. By working together, we can prepare children to be successful and ready for school. We offer families many options to communicate with administrative staff, teachers, and Family Support Advocates.

Here are some ways parents and staff can communicate with one another:

Parent Teacher Conferences	Emails Phone Calls Texts
Socializations	Flyers Memos Newsletters
Home Visits	Office of Head Start HS website
Parent Meetings Policy Council	Social Media Facebook page

Open Door Policy |

At RFS, we believe in fostering strong partnerships with families. Parents are welcome to visit the program at any time, ask questions, and offer suggestions. If you wish to speak with a teacher, simply request a meeting through the Center Director or via the Interactive Communication System. We are committed to accommodating your request as quickly as possible.

We encourage you to communicate openly with our support and teaching staff—we want you to feel welcome and engaged in your child's early learning journey. Our goal is to create a positive experience for both your child and your family.

Visiting the Classroom |

Parents are welcome to visit their child in the classroom. If you would like to visit the classroom, please call to schedule a day and time in advance. Please do not bring other children to the classroom visit.

ChildPlus - Interactive Communication System

ChildPlus is a Head Start data management software, providing tools for various aspects of program operation, including enrollment, attendance, health, family services, and reporting. It is designed to streamline workflows, improve data accuracy, and facilitate reporting for Head Start programs. ChildPlus also offers features for managing family partnerships, health information, and program monitoring using tools like the **CLASS© system**, other assessment tools.

Key Features and Functionality

Data Management |

ChildPlus centralizes data related to children, families, staff, and program operations, allowing for efficient tracking and reporting.

Enrollment and Attendance |

The system facilitates the enrollment process, manages attendance records, and provides tools for tracking attendance patterns.

Health and Family Services |

ChildPlus includes modules for managing health information, tracking health screenings, and documenting family services interactions.

Program Monitoring |

Features like the CLASS© system and DRDP assessments enable programs to monitor teacher-child interactions and child development progress, supporting data-driven decision-making.

Reporting |

ChildPlus generates various reports for program evaluation, compliance, and parent communication, including the Program Information Report (PIR).

User-Friendly Interface |

ChildPlus offers a user-friendly interface with features like the To-Do List and Dashboard for efficient navigation and task management, according to a ChildPlus Desktop Getting Started Guide.

Integration |

ChildPlus integrates with other systems and tools, such as the DRDP and CLASS©, to provide a comprehensive solution for Head Start programs.

Customization |

ChildPlus allows for customization to reflect specific agency and program information, ensuring it meets individual needs, according to a ChildPlus Setup Guide.

Creating community. Building knowledge. Together. - Academy +

The Academy is Head Start's home for professional learning. Open to everyone who works in early childhood, every course is designed with your needs in mind. Whether you are leading a program, assisting in a classroom, or keeping a facility sparkling clean, you will feel at home here. Our rich content and human-centered approach will enable you to hone your skills, increase your knowledge, and improve the amazing work you do every day, brightening the futures of the children you serve. The Academy's schedule is tailored to allow learners to further their careers as staff, and parents, to further their careers, experience and knowledge while balancing work, family, and other responsibilities. Join this network who are committed to supporting your success - throughout the program and beyond.

Follow up with child's center director and/or your assigned Family Support Advocate, to receive access to the Academy +.

Learn from the leaders in early childhood development and education |

The Academy features expert faculty, all of whom are practicing teachers, coaches, curriculum directors, or educational leaders. Read the full Instructor Non-Solicitation For Learning Events Policy disclosure [here](#).

Expand your skills and engage with a national network of educators |

Learn in-demand skills with our on-demand and self-paced as well as live online programs. Each is uniquely designed to be relevant to your career , what you learn today can be immediately applied tomorrow.

Advance your career with flexible pathways |

Our courses are built for educators at any point in their careers, from those taking on new responsibilities to seasoned professionals. Identify which traits and skills are essential for you to grow, adapt, and succeed.

Enroll in a program that will expand your skills and your career potential.

Policy Council

The Policy Council receives and uses monthly, annual, and periodic reports to approve and submit to the Governing Board. These reports contain components that drive decisions within RFS. The Policy Council is the parent's voice in planning and decision making. It is comprised of parents of currently enrolled children and community representatives and serves as the link between parent committee and the agencies' governing board.

The Policy Council does not independently make decisions or have any responsibilities for the operation of the program.

Head Start Performance Standards require that each program has an active Policy Council to receive federal funding.

Each EHS center and home-based receives the ability to elect Policy Council Representative and an Alternate. The Policy Council meetings are held monthly.

Volunteer Opportunities

In the Classroom

- Help prepare curriculum materials
- Help with classroom set-up and/or clean-up
- Interact with small groups doing activities
- Read to the children
- Share cultural heritage
- Share a skill/talent

Outside the Classroom

- Assist with event planning, set-up and/or clean-up
- Complete the Home Curriculum Activities with your child
- Help gather or make classroom materials
- Office assistance - copying, sorting, etc.
- Participate in a Recruitment event
- Participate in Policy Council

South Carolina law requires all agency employees to complete both federal and state background checks. To ensure the health and safety of the children we serve, volunteers are also required to undergo the same background checks annually. If you are interested in volunteering, please inform your assigned Family Support Advocate or teacher.

Family Complaint Procedure

This procedure provides a system for hearing and resolving parent and community complaints/concerns about the program. If a parent wishes to file a complaint against the Early Head Start program, the following process should be followed:

- Complaints/concerns should be discussed with the programs' management team first
- Complaints/concerns should then be discussed with the Early Head Start Program Director
- Complaints/concerns can be addressed in writing, email and/or by phone
- RFS office is 1800 St. Julian Place, Suite 406, Columbia, South Carolina 29204. The office can also be reached by phone at 803-256-7237. The Program Director will review the concern and investigate the issue with the appropriate staff.
- Community complaints/concerns will be directed to the Policy Council and/or agency Governing Board

A follow-up letter will be sent, or a follow-up phone call made to the parent or community member reiterating the concern and how the issue has been addressed or resolved.

Parents may also obtain a copy of our center-based licensing inspection report from the South Carolina Department of Social Service Department.

Pledge of Cooperation & Code of Conduct

Early Head Start Pledge of Cooperation

- I will do my best to help my child get the most from the Early Head Start program
- I will make sure that my child and I are prepared to be fully engaged with our Family Support Advocate during all scheduled Home Visits
- I will try to attend every socialization and program activity with my child
- I will speak to my child directly and listen when my child speaks to me. I will put my cell phone away and keep the TV off as much as possible
- I will work on suggested activities between weekly Home Visits and complete my weekly home activity log
- I will provide as many trips and experiences outside the neighborhood as my time and resources permit
- I will show my child I'm interested by being responsive to his/her needs
- I will read to my child daily
- I will see that my child has regular well-baby check-ups and receives all his/her immunizations

Code of Conduct

Parents, guardians, and other family members are encouraged to respect the feelings, rights, and property of others. While on the center grounds, attending any activities sponsored by RFS, parents, guardians, and other family members are expected to:

- Not loiter in the halls or on the premises
- Not smoke, not vape
- Not use profane or vulgar language
- Respect the environment around them
- Discipline and interact with their child in accordance with the program policy. Harsh punishment, physical force, and loud tones of voices will be addressed if observed
- Not ask staff for personal favors, such as using phones, special privileges, child care services, or transportation

Resource Directory

South Carolina Department of Social Service - DSS	South Carolina Department of Social Service - DSS	www.dss.sc.gov 803-714-7300
South Carolina First Steps	636 Rosewood Drive Columbia, SC 29201	www.scfirststeps.org 803.734.0479
SCDSS - Abuse & Neglect Reporting	1-888-227-3487 - Hotline	
South Carolina State Head Start Association (SCSHSA)	2700 Middleburg Dr, Ste. 213 Columbia, South Carolina, 29204	864-505-3467 sc-headstart.com
Office of Head Start	330 C Street, S.W. Mailstop 4301 Washington, DC 20201	www.headstart.gov www.acf.gov/ohs 866 - 763 - 6481
South Carolina Child Care Early Care & Education	Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Toll-Free: (888) 834-8096 Main Line: (803) 898-0959 Monitoring: (803) 898-0971	www.scchildcare.org
	Child Care Licensing Central Office Central Office: (803) 898-9020 Toll-Free: (800) 556-7445 Fax: (803) 898-9029	
	Child Care Operations Center Client Number: (800) 476-0199 Provider Number: (800) 262-4416 Complaint Line: (800) 763-2223	
SC Child Care Resource & Referral (SC CCR&R)	1530 Wheat Street Columbia, SC 29208	888-335-1002 sc-crr.org
PASO Perinatal Awareness for Successful Outcomes Educate Connect Advocate	120 Research Drive Columbia, South Carolina 29203	Scpasos.org

Family Handbook Acknowledgement Form

It is important that you formally acknowledge the review and receipt of the 2025–2026 Family Handbook.

As you know, the Family Handbook provides detailed guidance on the policies and procedures of our Early Head Start program, covering both center-based and home-based services. It is designed to support you in understanding how our program operates and how we work together to ensure the highest quality of care and education for your child.

The handbook is aligned with the Head Start Performance Standards as well as the South Carolina Department of Social Services licensing regulations. It is a vital tool to ensure that all families have a shared understanding of our expectations, safety procedures, and daily operations.

Please take the time to carefully read the policies and procedures outlined in the handbook. If there is anything that you do not understand, we encourage you to ask questions. Your understanding is critical, and we are here to support you in that process.

As part of this acknowledgment, please:

- Initial each point listed below to confirm that you have read, had read to you, or had interpreted for you the key talking points.
- Print your child(ren)'s name
- Print and Sign your full name
- Return the completed form to your assigned Family Support Advocate or any member of our agency management team.

	Purpose of the Handbook Declaration		Management - ACE Squad Team FSA's
	Professional Relationships Boundaries & Communication		Confidentiality
	Program Operations Hours of Operation		Emergency Contact ID Verification
	Program Calendar		Code of Conduct Pledge of Cooperation
	Attendance Policy Late Arrival & Pick up		Parent & Teacher Conferences
	SISO Handwashing Procedure		Parent involvement Policy Council
	Morning Health Checks		Inclement Weather Transportation
	Dress Code Field Trips Materials Swim		Screenings Assessments Observations
	Cell Phone Smoke & Scent Free		Home Visit Requirements
	Discipline Policy Corporal Punishment		Mandated Reporting
	Sick Child Policy Communicable Disease		ERSEA Family Services
	Medication Administration		ChildPlus Interactive System
	Immunization Health Dental Vision		CACFP Food Allergies Nut-Free Policy

Family Handbook Signature Page

Thank you for your time and partnership. Together, we are committed to creating a nurturing, safe, and engaging environment for every child and family we serve.

Child Name (printed):

Child Name (printed):

Child Name (printed):

Parent Name (printed):

Parent Signature:

_____ Date: _____

RCFS Representative Signature:

_____ Date: _____

Administrative Directory

Governing Board

Rachael Fulmer	Board Chair
Deon Generette	Vice Board Chair
William Jeter	Treasurer
Dr. Cassandra Legette	Secretary

RFS Early Head Start Program

Senior Leadership		
Elizabeth Kabalka	Executive Director	ekabalka@richlandfirststeps.org
An Jeanette Paredes	Program Director	aparedes@richlandfirststeps.org
Salli McCartha	Director of Human Resource and Administration	smccartha@richlandfirststeps.org
Tasha Robinson	Finance Director	finance@richlandfirststeps.org
Program Leadership		
Quinn Baker	Director of Family Strengthening	qbaker@richlandfirststeps.org
Chris Blount	Education Coach	educationcoach@richlandfirststeps.org
LaKeema Maybank	Ridgewood Center Director	rwdirector@richlandfirststeps.org
Jasmine Rucker	EHS Intake Coordinator	ehsintake@richlandfirststeps.org
Sammantha Truesdale	Health Disability Coordinator	healthcoor@richlandfirststeps.org
Joanne Vaughn	Virginia Wingard Center Director	vwdirector@richlandfirststeps.org
Marlon Vickerman	Marketing & Communication Coordinator	mrvickerman@richlandfirststeps.org
Xia Stanley	Mental Wellness and Social Development Coach	mwsdcoach@richlandfirststeps.org
Program Support Staff		
Amy Raynor	Office Manager	officemanager@richlandfirststeps.org
	Operation Coordinator	oc@richlandfirststeps.org
Jill Aderholdt	Family Support Advocate EHS Home-based	jaderholdt@richlandfirststeps.org
Regina Free	Family Support Advocate Connected Families	rfree@richlandfirststeps.org
Shannon Helton	Family Support Advocate Lower Richland	Shelton@richlandfirststeps.org
Wanda Ortiz	Family Support Advocate EHS Home-based	wortiz@richlandfirststeps.org
Nomaneka Parker	Family Support Advocate VW & RW	nparker@richlandfirststeps.org
Nikiyah Spearman	Family Support Advocate Lower Richland	nspearman@richlandfirststeps.org
Barbara Stephenson	Family Support Advocate Connected Families	bstephenson@richlandfirststeps.org
Amber Tanner	Family Support Advocate VW	atanner@richlandfirststeps.org
Laura Torres	Family Support Advocate EHS Home-based	ltorres@richlandfirststeps.org

Program Teaching Staff- Ridgewood Center		
LaShayla Burke	Ridgewood Center	Floater
Jennifer Carter	Ridgewood Center	Orange Room
Monica Davis	Ridgewood Center	Red Room
Alex Jimenez	Ridgewood Center	Green Room
Ashley McDaniel	Ridgewood Center	Red Room
Dai'Jhana Munford	Ridgewood Center	Orange Room
Jessica Robledo	Ridgewood Center	Custodian Kitchen Floater
Jasmine Rogers	Ridgewood Center	Purple Room
Niaja Swinton	Ridgewood Center	Purple Room
Kierston Williams	Ridgewood Center	Green Room

Administrative Directory

Program Teaching Staff- Virginia Wingard Center		
Kelci Almy	Virginia Wingard Center	Floater
Bre Brown	Virginia Wingard Center	Orange Room
Nicole Burwick	Virginia Wingard Center	Red Room
Alicia Cheeseboro	Virginia Wingard Center	Blue Room
DeAndra Corbit	Virginia Wingard Center	Indigo Room
Sophia Davis	Virginia Wingard Center	Yellow Room
Zuri Foreman	Virginia Wingard Center	Custodian/ Kitchen
Courtney Gladden	Virginia Wingard Center	Red Room
Doris Green	Virginia Wingard Center	Green Room
Eboni Green	Virginia Wingard Center	Indigo Room
Di Hall	Virginia Wingard Center	Lead Floater
Shania Harbour	Virginia Wingard Center	Orange Room
Rose Harley	Virginia Wingard Center	Purple Room
Keisha Richardson	Virginia Wingard Center	Blue Room
Yahaira Smith	Virginia Wingard Center	Green Room
Takeita Whetstone	Virginia Wingard Center	Floater
Latifah Williams	Virginia Wingard Center	Purple Room

