2026-
2027



VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Head Start
Early Head Start
New Opportunities

WELCOME VOLUNTEER

Welcome and sincere thanks to you, the volunteer, who is willing to donate your time to help us in the program. You are an important part of our program. We want you to feel that your time with us is a rewarding and challenging part of your volunteer experience.

Even if you have prior experience, it is natural to feel some uncertainty about how you will fit into the classroom environment, connect with the children, or adjust to the area in which you choose to volunteer.

The teacher will clarify any questions you may have. This handbook will provide information and should be helpful as you begin your work.

As a volunteer, a HHS Criminal Background Check and physical exam must be completed prior to your services.



THE FIRST DAYS IN THE CENTER

You will find Head Start/Early Head Start staff to welcome you at the center. They will get you off to a good start. Read the lesson plan for the day. Note the curriculum for the day.

Your first day will most likely be one of active participation. You may feel comfortable in joining in when there are group activities like games, books, finger plays, or songs. Later you may enjoy sharing your special talents. Volunteers may also be used in various ways within the program, helping with field trips, socializations, etc.

NOTE: In addition to working in the classroom, there are many Other ways to volunteer at Head Start

- Yard work
- Sewing
- Repairing Equipment
- Laundry of dishrags/towels
- Making playdough
- Cutting out materials for the classroom
- Preparing a bulletin board in the center
- Participate in Head Start In-service/training
- Office work

ASK THE STAFF IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN ANY OTHER VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START – 12 VOLUNTEER TIPS

1. Inform your center or home based educator of the day you want to volunteer. Call if you can't make it.
2. Wear comfortable clothing that you don't mind getting dirty.
3. If you have any QUESTIONS about what to do or if you need HELP with the children, ask a teacher.
4. We encourage volunteers to GET DOWN ON THE FLOOR with the children and GET INVOLVED WITH THE ACTIVITIES.
5. When TALKING with a child, get down at the child's eye level.
6. Always PRAISE AND ENCOURAGE a child's work. ASK children QUESTIONS, get involved with the activities and listen to them – DON'T DIRECT them.
7. NEVER LEAVE CHILDREN ALONE.
8. If a child MISBEHAVES, ask a teacher what to do.
9. If you DISAGREE with a procedure, wait until the end of the day to discuss it with the teachers.
10. Don't DISCUSS children's behavior or appearance in front of them.
11. Never SHARE information about a child with anyone other than Head Start/EHS Staff.
12. At the END OF THE DAY, meet briefly with the teacher to DISCUSS how your day went, sign the IN-KIND SHEET AND SIGN-UP for another day to volunteer.



GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH CHILDREN

It takes time for young children to get to know new people well enough to be sure of them. When they are not sure, they show this in different ways. Some may be shy and not want you to help them; others may be "silly" and look for teasing ways to get your attention. Volunteers can make it easier for children to know them when they first start work by doing the following:

1. If you are a parent, guardian, or relative, prepare your child before you come so they will not expect you to devote all your time to them.
2. Don't bring unenrolled children - licensing covers Early Head Start/Head Start children only.
3. Dress comfortably in something you aren't worried about getting dirty and wear comfortable shoes.
4. NO SMOKING OR VAPING ON PREMISES.
5. Be friendly, smile and use the children's names as soon as you can. Say "hello" when you come each day.
6. Be alert to potentially dangerous situations at your site. It may be doors that swing easily or particular play equipment. KNOW WHERE THE FIRST AID KIT IS and the direction for fire and tornado drills.
7. Refer questions from visitors or parents to the teacher.
8. If you have a specific assignment, BE RESPONSIBLE AND STAY WITH IT.
9. Keep attention on children. Choose a good area for observation so you can always see the children. Make only positive statements about the children. Always be aware of feelings.
10. Any disagreement with procedures, techniques, etc., should be discussed with the teacher and not in front of the children or parents. You are encouraged to express your feelings to the teacher whose position requires that they resolve any conflicts or difference of opinion. The final decision rests with the teacher.
11. State what you want the children to do. Conversations that start with "Johnny, don't do..." have negative implications and often negative results. Instead of "don't run" – say, "use walking feet."

12. AVOID COMPARISONS with other children - in any activity, art, ability, or behavior.

13. Use your VOICE as a learning tool. Keep it low and make conversation on a face-to-face level or sit. Avoid calling loudly across a room or showing your anger in tone of voice. The most effective speech is simple and direct, perhaps somewhat slow. Decreasing speed is more effective than raising pitch.

14. OFFER A CHOICE WHEN YOU CAN REALLY GIVE ONE. "Do you want to use red or green paint? is a true choice; "Do you want lunch now? is not. Try not to end directions with – OK?

15. Treat each child with respect.

16. NEVER DISAPPROVE OF A CHILD even though you may feel disapproval of what he does. You may say, "That is not a good thing to do", but avoid saying, "You are a bad boy for doing that". A child needs to know you still like them even though he hurt another child or did something he should not have done.

17. Give the child maximum opportunity to grow their independence. Help the child work out their problem rather than solving it for them, but respond to their request for help. Examples: help the child find out that boards must be placed in the wagon in a certain way; let children get into their coats and sweaters, let children put on aprons by themselves - what they are learning is more important than meeting a schedule.

18. Familiarize yourself with the limits posted in each area. Limits are necessary; they are clearly defined and consistently enforced.

19. Use the most effective position for observing. Enrichment of experience will come when an adult is observing all the children and their interests, not just one child. For example, the adult who is reading to children may encourage a shy child who is ready for a change in activity by encouraging them to leave the group before his lack of attention disrupts others.



BLOCK AND BUILDING CENTER

WHAT THIS ACTIVITY DOES FOR THE CHILD:

1. Expands children's vocabulary and language by talking about their buildings.
2. Gives sensory pleasure - smooth, hard, heavy.
3. Helps them learn shapes, relative sizes, balance, and methods of construction.
4. Encourages children to explore patterns and relationships by pointing out patterns children have made in their constructions. Suggest that children draw a picture of their block design.
5. Improves small muscle coordination.
6. Can be a social experience, engaging several children.
7. Teaches number concepts by suggesting that children put away blocks in sets ("Everyone take three blocks at a time to put away").

Procedure for Volunteer:

1. Watch closely to avert ANY dangerous situations.
2. Pile up a few blocks to start an activity with a child who wants to partcipate but cannot start it.
3. Help the child protect their structure if they wish – some children derive great satisfaction from solitary building.
4. Talk with children about the different shapes and how many blocks they need.
5. Help children find and return blocks to their designated place.
6. Suggest props a child might like to use.

OUTDOOR AREA

What This Activity Does for each child:

1. Outdoor time is important for children's health and well-being.
2. Children can learn about nature firsthand.
3. They develop their large muscle skills and coordination.

Procedure for Volunteer:

1. Help supervise children at play.
2. Play a game with children.
3. Take an interest in discoveries (e.g., watching a caterpillar, collecting leaves.)
4. Share a special skill or interest (e.g., woodworking, gardening, basketball, ring toss).
5. Teach children jump rope rhythms and clapping games to promote phonological awareness. Have them tune into the sounds and sights around them: how the horn on a car sounds vs. the horn on a truck or

bus; identifying animal sounds such as; crickets, birds, mosquitoes, frogs, cats and dogs.

6. Expand children's vocabulary and language by asking questions and encouraging them to describe what they see. Use a variety of adjectives when you observe with children; slimy, bright, bold, glowing, rough, furry, prickly, and so on.
7. Help children learn about print, letters, and words by providing paper to make signs or write.
8. Promote problem solving by guiding children to find solutions to problems they encounter (e.g., what can we do to keep the balls from going over the fence?)
9. Expose children to physical science concepts by offering them balls, ramps, tubes, water wheels, funnels, and sifters.
10. Guide children's development of processing skills by posing questions such as: "What would happen if…? How can you find out? What did you learn? Encourage children to be good observers by showing them that you too are interested in finding out what is waiting for you each day outdoors.



TECHNOLOGY

What This Activity Does for Child:

1. Makes children aware of technology by including computers, iPads, & Smart Boards in your everyday classroom life, so children start regarding them as natural tools.
2. The software selected engages children in active learning.
3. Children can work together on the computer, iPad, and Smart Board.

Procedure for Volunteer:

1. Assist children in following the procedures for using technology devices.
2. Help children find programs and learn how to use them.
3. Participate in playing a game on the device.
4. Expand children's vocabulary and language development by introducing them to apps that label vocabulary with pictures, written words, and the spoken word.

5. Increase children's understanding of books by using apps that read books to children.
6. Enhance children's knowledge of print by recording their responses on a reading app. Some programs give children hints on reading words and use pictures to show how words combine to form sentences.
7. Help children practice learning about letters and words with a program that matches pictures to their beginning letters.
8. Develop children's enjoyment of literacy by letting them explore electronic storybooks.



WRITING CENTER

What This Activity Does for Child:

1. Uses tools for writing and drawing.
2. Makes and interprets representations.
3. Demonstrates knowledge of the alphabet.
4. Uses emerging reading skills to make meaning from print.
5. Understands the purpose of writing.
6. Writes letters and words.

Procedure for Volunteer:

1. Help children gain knowledge of print by recording their experiences and their discoveries on charts. Draw their attention to letters and words used in the Discovery Area (e.g., "Puff's name starts with a "P", just like yours.").
2. Build children's vocabulary and language by talking with them about their discoveries. Use every opportunity to introduce new vocabulary as they touch, feel, taste, hear, and observe objects and living things (e.g., "The caterpillar has spun a cocoon." "This sap from the wood is very sticky".)
   Encourage them to describe what they are doing, for example, "I can make the Ping-pong ball move fast when I blow into the straw really hard".

3. Help children learn about letters and words by talking about them as they read and write.
4. Strengthen children's knowledge of print by encouraging them to draw and write (using scribbles or transitional spelling) about the designs and constructions they make.
5. Help children learn about letters and words by talking with them as they manipulate magnetic letters, letter blocks, and letter tiles. Describe what you see happening as children arrange letters, (e.g., "You made a word! You put an m, and a, and a t together and spelled mat!").



DRAMATIC PLAY AREA

WHAT THIS ACTIVITY DOES FOR THE CHILD:

1. Helps child feel at ease in school because it is almost 100% familiar – a good link between home and school.
2. Permits child to play out family experiences and try different family roles- father, mother, baby, etc.
3. Stimulates imagination.
4. Encourages languages and vocabulary by introducing and teaching children the names of props.
5. Guides problem solving by helping children to find solutions to problems they encounter.

Procedure for Volunteer:

1. Participate very little unless invited to join, e.g., a tea party.
2. If a child seems to be having difficulty entering the group, suggest roles to them and help them ease into it.
3. Suggest ideas to extend make-believe play.
4. Be sure materials are returned to storage areas neatly when children are through.

MANIPULATIVE AREA

WHAT THIS ACTIVITY DOES FOR CHILD:

1. These materials teach math, develop eye-hand coordination, and promotes small muscle skills.
2. Allows freedom of use of activities which allows child to make choices and be creative.

Procedure for Volunteer:

1. Help children to develop problem-solving skills as they construct, design and assemble materials. Encourage them to put puzzles together, make designs with parquetry and pattern blocks, sort and classify collections or construct a building with Lego blocks.
2. Help children to develop number concepts such as counting beads, blocks, and teddy bears.. Use mathematical terminology as you compare quantities – more than, less than, the same as.
3. Encourage child to put activity away when they are finished.
4. Enhance children's vocabulary and language by talking with them as they play.



BOOKS AND LIBRARY CENTER

WHAT THIS ACTIVITY DOES FOR THE CHILD:

1. Children develop valuable literacy skills and a love for books.
2. It is a quiet place to get away and enjoy books.

3. Introduces children to new words.
4. The most important letters are the ones in children's names.
5. Develops children's phonological awareness by reading stories that play with language such as Dr. Seuss books and other rhyming books.

Procedure for Volunteer:

1. If a child asks you to read to them, do so.
2. Hold books right side up so children are able to see pictures and print.
3 Increase their knowledge of print by sweeping your hand under the words as you read or demonstrating writing top-to-bottom and left-to-right on a chart.
4. Develop their comprehension skills by using open-ended questions during storybook reading. Encourage children to retell familiar stories using props to gain a sense of story



ART CENTER

WHAT THIS ACTIVITY DOES FOR THE CHILD:

1. Children need time to explore and experiment with different materials.
2. Creative art is the way children express their own ideas and feelings.
3. Adults should not impose their own ideas on children.
4. Provides the opportunity to "paint out" his/her feelings.
5. There are predictable stages in children's artwork.
6. Can be messy but this is OK.

Procedure for Volunteer:

1. Encourage children to experiment with paint, markers, playdoh, and collage materials.

2. Refrain from asking child what their picture "is"- instead talk with the child about their picture.
3. Help with a special activity such as making playdoh.
4. Teach knowledge of print by having children sign their names to the picture or post their names next to sculptures, mobiles, and assemblages. With their permission, write children's descriptions of their work directly on their artwork or on an accompanying sentence strip.
5. Encourage children to observe patterns in art such as stripes, colors, or shapes.
6. Help children develop an understanding of one-to-one correspondence as they place one paintbrush in each paint pot or replace a cap on each marker.
7. Introduce children to physical science by conducting experiments with different art media. As they add water to clay or mix paints together, encourage children to observe changes.



SENSORY TABLE

WHAT THIS ACTIVITY DOES FOR CHILD:

1. These are soothing materials that calm children.
2. There are scientific and mathematical discoveries children can make.
3. Offers children varied opportunities to learn about the earth and the environment through their everyday observations of sand and water in the outdoors.

Procedure for Volunteer:

1. Remind children to keep the sand and water in the tub.
2. Offer props and talk about what children are discovering.
3. Help with a special activity like blowing bubbles, testing what floats/sinks.
4. Ask open-ended questions that not only encourage children to experiment, but also provide opportunities to express the way they feel when playing with sand and water.

5. Teach number concepts by having children count how many measuring cups of sand are needed to fill a pail.
6. Encourage children to make patterns in damp sand/playdoh using objects like shells or cookie cutters.
7. Introduce children to firsthand experience of physical science by giving them props such as ramps, gutters, funnels, and sieves that they can explore with sand and water.



EFFECTIVE VERBAL GUIDANCE TECHNIQUES

1. Speak in a low, calm, kind voice. This provides a good role model for the children.
2. Speak directly to the children; do not call to them across the classroom.
3. Speak in short, meaningful sentences which children can understand.
4. Get down to the children's eye level; for example, stoop, squat, or sit on a low chair so that they can see your face.
5. Be sure the children know you are listening to them when they are talking to you.
6. Answer the children's questions, but do not monopolize their conversation. They need to associate with friends of their own age.
7. Keep your voice and facial expression pleasant.
8. Express your requests to children in a positive way. This will help the children learn a more effective way of doing things.
9. Accept the child even though you do not endorse his actions. Say, "at our school we are nice to all our friends."
10. Help children learn to be proud of themselves and feel good about themselves. Making fun of a child, comparing them to others or calling them a baby only reinforces a child's idea that he is not as good as others. Say, "you've worked hard on your painting - it is different colors". Avoid comparison: "Why don't you draw a house like Johnny?" Say, "It's hard to tie shoes, but I know you are practicing". Avoid shaming: "you should be able to tie your own shoes. Don't act like a baby.

VOLUNTEER DO'S & DON'T'S

- Encourage interaction between parent & child during activities.
- Help parent with child when asked.
- Help home based educator when asked.

What to Say...	INSTEAD OF…
Sit down when you slide.	Don't stand when you slide.
Dig in the sand.	Don't throw the sand.
Sit on the swing.	Don't stand on the swing.
Use both hands when you climb.	You'll fall if you don't watch out.
Climb down the ladder.	Don't jump off the ladder.
Keep the puzzle on the table.	Don't dump the puzzle pieces on the floor.
Turn the pages carefully.	Don't tear the book.
Use quiet voices.	Don't shout.
Wipe your hands with a paper towel.	Don't put your hands on anything.
Sit on your chair.	Don't rock on your chair.
Walk around the swing.	Be careful, the swing might hit you.
Put an apron on.	Don't you want to put an apron on?
Time to wash your hands.	Don't you want to wash your hands?
Move back on your spot.	Don't lean forward so that other children can't see.
Throw the stick over the fence.	Don't play with the stick, you might hurt someone.



MEALTIMES

Statement of Nutritional Philosophy

At Head Start, we believe that all children have the right to optimal nutrition with appropriate amounts of healthy, well prepared, high quality foods. We believe adequate diets help children to be healthy and attentive learners. We believe that parents want the very best for their children. We believe all families should have access to information about sound nutrition principles.
Children are our most important resource. It is our responsibility at Head Start to ensure parents and staff work together to teach children about healthy foods and eating habits. We:

- Provide low-sugar, low-sodium meals prepared without excessive fat;
- Stress the importance of healthy, nutrient-dense foods rather than sweet foods or foods that are nutrient-poor;
- Stress the role of foods and nutrients in dental health;
- Set an example as adults, by serving, eating, and enjoying a wide variety of nutritious foods during all program activities;
- Serve family-style meals and snacks, where children and adults eat together, serve themselves, employ safe food handling practices, practice table manners, socialize, try new foods, and enjoy mealtimes;
- Avoid the use of food as a reward or a punishment.

By following these guidelines, we are supporting children and families to have healthy attitudes about good, nutritious foods and teaching them to make wise choices throughout their lives.

Mealtime Expectations

Mealtimes at Head Start are intended to provide children with optimal nourishment and expose them to a variety of foods but it is also a time to teach children proper table manners, allow

them to improve their autonomy and to engage them in meaningful conversation. The following mealtime expectations are intended to promote a positive mealtime experience:

- Adults (staff and volunteers) are expected to participate in the meal with children, eating the foods the children are eating
- No outside food is allowed in the classroom.
- Children should be appropriately encouraged to serve themselves with help available as needed.
- Encourage but do not require or coerce children to take any item they do not want
- Head Start does not allow the use of "No Thank You bites" or "Clean Plate Clubs" to encourage children to eat more food than they want
- Children should not be required to finish one item before they have additional amounts of another food. For example, an adult may not say, "After you finish your beans, then you can have more peaches."
- Never use food as a reward or punishment
- Mealtime should be a relaxing, enjoyable environment. Adults are encouraged to engage children and have conversation during mealtime, setting the pace for the meal so children are not rushed to eat their food.
- Children should be offered foods multiple times during meals.
- Outside beverages must be in a opaque cup.

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