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# Semcac Head Start

## Parent/Guardian Handbook

2009—2010

**Mission:**

Semcac Head Start is committed to enriching and empowering young children and families by providing opportunities for personal growth and development through comprehensive services and partnerships in the community.

**An Equal Opportunity Program.**



# WELCOME TO HEAD START!



Head Start is a family centered program that focuses on the growth and development of three and four year old children. Our goal is to give children the opportunity to grow and develop to their full potential. Because parents are the biggest influence in their children's lives, they take part in activities that help them learn and grow with their child.

The Head Start program is operated by Semcac, a nonprofit community action agency located in Rushford, Minnesota. The program is funded through the federal Department of Health and Human Services and the Minnesota Department of Education. The counties served are Dodge, Fillmore, Houston, Mower, Steele, and Winona.

We offer Center-based services which are described later in the handbook. Semcac Head Start also has developed collaborative partnerships with community programs to best serve families. At least 90% of the Head Start children must be from families who meet federal income guidelines. 10% of our enrollment is made available for children with special needs. No child will be denied enrollment to Head Start on the basis of disability, race, sex, creed, color or national origin. There is no charge for Head Start Services.

Head Start supports families in:

- Becoming more aware of individual strengths.
- Maintaining a strong sense of family and self-worth.
- Being able to identify and evaluate needs.
- Increasing their ability to find and use community resources.
- Education and development of young children.
- Health and nutrition needs promoting wellness.

In addition to Head Start, Semcac operates many other programs. Please refer to the Semcac Annual report in your parent packet for information on these programs.

With your assistance and involvement, the program will be a positive and rewarding experience. We ask your cooperation in meeting the various federal and state requirements because it helps the program keep funded.

At the Family and Child Orientation, you will receive a card with information on your classroom operations. On the last page of the handbook is a listing of Semcac Head Start staff who will support you and your teaching staff.

We look forward to getting to know you!

Please Join Us. Parents Are Always Welcome.  
You may visit the program anytime during the hours of  
operation. Children Love Having Their Parents  
Volunteer at the Center!



## **CLASSROOM SERVICES**

Children come to the Head Start center Monday through Thursday. The program runs from September through May. Daily sessions are 3 ½ hours each and children attend the preschool Head Start center Monday through Thursday. Centers are licensed under Rule 3 by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

## **WHAT WILL MY CHILD LEARN?**

Our goal is for children to grow and develop to their full potential. We want children to experience the excitement of making new discoveries and mastering new skills. It is important for children to grow:

- Intellectually – being able to name colors and shapes, solve problems, recognize letters and numbers, enjoy stories.
- Socially - the ability to get along with others, taking turns, respecting others, developing friendships.
- Emotionally - be confident, develop healthy self-esteem, deal with feelings, develop self-control.
- Physically - small and large muscle coordination, balance, cut with scissors, hold a pencil.

### **Curriculum**

The pre-school years are a special time in the life of young children. They are learning to trust others outside the family. They gain independence and self-control. At the same time they observe people and experiment with objects in their environment. The ability to express themselves and understand others using language is growing quickly.

It is important that children feel safe and valued, their physical needs are met, and they feel secure. Teaching staff provide opportunities for children to learn and practice new skills. Activities challenge them to build on the skills they have.

Standards say there are specific content areas in which children need to have experiences. They are literacy and language, math and science, social studies, creative arts and process/approach to learning. We use the Creative Curriculum as a framework for planning learning experiences for children.

The environment is an important part of the curriculum. The classroom is divided into learning centers. Children learn by choosing, actively exploring and experimenting. Learning centers generally include:

Blocks	Creative art	Dramatic play	Library/Writing
Math/Science	Sensory table	Table toys	Active play

Children are learning lifelong health habits like hand-washing; tooth-brushing; dressing for the weather; staying safe; healthy food choices; safety in the home, on the bus, in the classroom; and more. We practice fire and tornado drills in the center. Children will have a chance to practice leaving the bus safely in the case of an emergency.

Teachers develop a weekly lesson plan that organizes activities and experience around a theme. Parents can review this lesson plan and provide appropriate input at any time. A detailed Curriculum Summary/Child Care Program Plan is also available from your Teacher.

### **Daily Schedule**

Children are actively engaged during throughout the day. The daily schedule is posted at the center. A typical schedule includes:

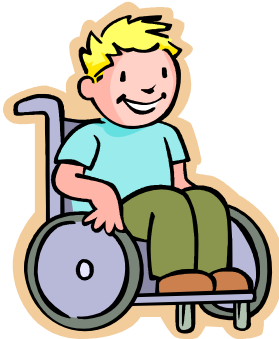
- Circle Time – Group activities when children listen and share in activities with others.
- Free Play – Children explore the learning centers and activities. They choose what activities interest them.
- Small and Large Group Activities – Teacher staff work with children on a specific activity. It may be a game, a project for the classroom, or a hands-on investigation of an interesting topic.
- Meals – Health food choices, good manners, and enjoyment of sharing a meal with friends are important parts of the meal.
- Outside/Gym – Active play.
- Healthy habits are encouraged. Time is set aside for tooth-brushing, hand-washing etc.

### **Conferences and Home Visits**

Parents and teachers are partners working together to help children grow and learn. Family contacts are made four times throughout the year in your home and in the classroom. You and your child’s teacher will:

- Identify your child’s strengths and needs along with your family’s strengths and goals.
- Evaluate your child’s progress.
- Set goals and plan activities that will help your child grow.
- Review community resources and information available.

### **DISABILITIES/SPECIAL NEEDS**



- Every effort is made to meet each child’s individual need. If your child has a diagnosed disability or special need, Head Start will work with schools or other agencies to coordinate services.
  - If you have any concerns about your child’s development, talk to your child’s teacher.
  - Referrals for evaluation are made based on information from developmental/sensory screenings, classroom observations, medical records/history, and parent comments/concerns.
  - Written parental permission must be obtained before a referral is made to the School District or any agency.
  - When the evaluation is complete a meeting is held with parents, various school district staff and Head Start staff. It will be determined if your child qualifies for services from the school district (ECSE). If so, and you agree, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be developed.
- Head Start staff support parents through referral and the evaluation process. If you have questions at any time, contact your child’s teacher.

## HEALTH – KEEPING MY CHILD SAFE AND HEALTHY

### THE GOALS OF THE HEAD START HEALTH SERVICES ARE TO:

- Help meet each child’s physical, dental, and nutritional need by identifying problems, then referring and following-up as needed. Health and safety practices are followed throughout the Head Start Program.
- Provide direction in establishing life-long healthy habits.

The following is an overview of our health services. Please also see the Health Handbook for Parents for more information. It is enclosed in your Parent Packet.

### ACCIDENTS/INJURIES/EMERGENCIES



- Each child must have an Emergency and Release Information form on file. This form gives necessary approval for emergency treatment if needed. The state requires us to ask you to identify at least 2 other contact people on the form other than yourself.
- **Please let those people know that you have listed them as a contact person and that they may be called if we cannot reach you.**
- If a child is injured at the center or on the bus, the parent will be called. If Head Start Staff are unable to reach the parent, persons on the Emergency and Release Information form are called.
- Our staff is certified in first aid and CPR. If needed, medical professionals will be contacted and the child will be transported to a medical facility accompanied by staff.

### COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

- A “Health Alert” notice will be sent home the same day that a communicable disease is reported to the site.
- Contact your Teacher within 24 hours if your child has a contagious disease.



### HEALTH, DENTAL, AND DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENINGS

- Developmental and Social/Emotional screenings are completed annually to assist in the planning for your child.
- Children enrolled in Head Start need to complete a health exam or Well Child Check. It is important to get this completed as soon as possible as the state of Minnesota allows only 30 days for your child to attend Head Start without it. Dental exams are required annually and within ninety (90) days of enrollment.
- If health and dental exams are not completed as required, your child will not be able to attend until exams are complete. Please note that we request your cooperation in completing these requirements in order to keep our funding, but more importantly, because of the great benefit to your child’s long-term health.
- Head Start staff will work with you to get these exams completed by assisting with arranging appointments, transportation, etc.

### ILLNESS/EXCLUSION

To prevent spreading illnesses to others, keep your child home from the center, or call your Teacher to cancel a home visit if your child has any of the following:

- A temperature of 101 F orally/100 F auxiliary (under the arm) or higher before fever reducing medication is given.
- Vomited 2 or more times in the last 24 hours.
- Diarrhea (3 or more loose stools) during center or within 12 hours before center.

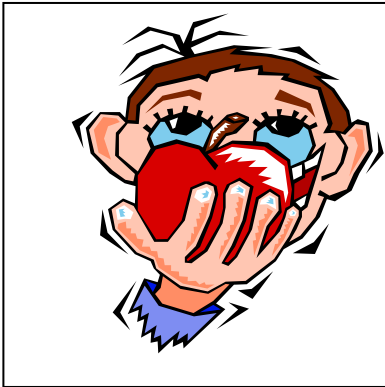


## **PAYMENT FOR SERVICES**

The billing for the health screening and dental exam will be submitted to Medical Assistance, Minnesota Care or your private insurance. If your child is not covered by a health insurance plan, our staff will assist you in accessing resources. Head Start must receive a copy of the denial letter from Medical Assistance to consider payment for services. Head Start has limited funds, therefore, all other possible services must be considered before Head Start could pay.

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

- Head Start's goal is to help build children's self-esteem, self-concepts and socialization skills. Social/Emotional development is essential to success in school and life.
- A Mental Health Professional (MHP) will observe in the classroom, assists with staff and parent training, and work with parents to find resources to meet their child's needs.
- It is important to identify problems early so needs can be met.



## **NUTRITION**

- Nutrition is part of the curriculum.
  - The children are served a nutritious breakfast or snack and lunch every day.
  - Semcac Head Start takes part in the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child and Adult Food Program.
  - You are encouraged to be a part of menu planning and you will receive a copy of the monthly menus.
  - All meals served meet the USDA meal pattern requirements and provide at least 1/3 of the child's daily nutritional needs
  - Parents are welcome to join us for mealtime. Please notify the Teacher at least one day before you will be eating a meal with us.
- Due to strict health and safety guidelines, no food will be allowed to be brought into Head Start for any classroom or parent event or activity. All foods offered at Head Start must be purchased/provided by Head Start.

In accordance with federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. If you think you have experienced discrimination, you may file a complaint. Write: USDA, Director, Civil rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 – or – Call: (202) 720-5964 (Voice or RDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## **PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Parent Involvement is the cornerstone of Head Start. Parents are their children's first and foremost teacher. You know your child's strengths, needs, and interests better than anyone else. Your input is welcome and needed. Children with parents involved in their education are more likely to:

- Enjoy learning and school life and do better in school;
- Improve their skills and attitudes such as developing confidence in themselves;
- Become better prepared for the future.



Positive male involvement plays a significant role in the child's development:

- Lower levels of disruptive behavior, acting out, depression, and telling lies;
- Obeying parents, being kind to others, and being responsible;
- Boys especially have fewer behavioral problems while girls are happier and more confident.

Parents and teaching staff plan activities together that help children grow as individuals and as members of the group. Your Teacher will help you set age appropriate goals for your child.

### **Be Involved and Help us Meet Our Non Federal Share/In Kind Goals**

The Federal Government funds Head Start, but our local communities must match 25% of the funding in volunteer hours or donations (the Non-Federal Share/In-Kind). *In-Kind* is a term used to describe how families and communities can help Head Start collect this non-federal share. Your classroom will have an In-Kind goal this year that you can help reach.

#### **Ways you can be involved to help meet the In-Kind goal:**

- Volunteer in the classroom
- Participate on a field trip
- Do educational activities with your child at home.
- Help with newsletters.
- Help plan activities/field trips with teaching staff.
- Help create bulletin boards.
- Attend Parent Meetings/Activities.
- Participate on Policy Council (our governing board).
- Evaluate the program.
- Mending or fixing books, toys, or furniture for the classroom.



Your teacher will always have an In-Kind form for you to sign. In-Kind is a very important part of the Head Start Program. Please remember to sign an In-Kind form for anything you do for the program. If we do not reach our goal, we have to return money to the federal office at a rate of \$4 to every dollar not met. Every dollar really does make a difference.



#### **Each site has a Parent Committee to:**

- Share ideas, feelings, concerns, and opinions.
- Help plan activities for your child.
- Gain knowledge from special speakers.
- Share, learn, and strengthen parenting skills.
- Learn about classroom activities.
- Learn about Policy Council decisions.
- Meet other parents, make friends, and HAVE FUN!

## Policy Council

Parents with children in the program now, past parents, and community members make up the Policy Council. Every Head Start site elects two parents to represent it at Policy Council. This gives parents the chance to take part in making decisions to better our program. Some of the work of Policy Council:

- Voice ideas of your local parent committee and share Policy Council information with your local parent committee.
- Have input into program design, planning and policies. For example, help determine enrollment criteria.
- Be involved in the hiring and, if needed, dismissing of staff.
- Serve as a link to the community and advocate for Semcac Head Start.

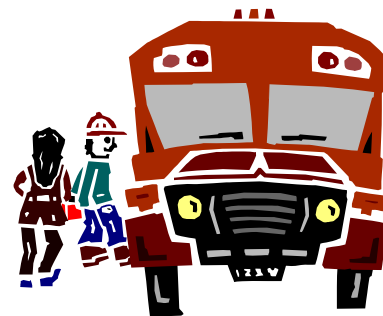
## Program Evaluation

Parent input is important to improve our Head Start program. Your constructive feedback is welcome at any time, however, there are two formal program processes:

- Every November, all families are sent a simple evaluation. You are asked to rate the program by your own experiences. In May, we repeat the survey.
- In March, the program completes a full “self-assessment”. Teams are formed of Policy Council members, Semcac Board, staff and community representatives. It is an opportunity to learn new skills and help the program improve.

## TRANSPORTATION – CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

- If possible, transportation is provided for children.
- When bus service is not provided, parents may be reimbursed mileage with prior approval.
- The length of the bus route is a maximum of one hour.
- Children use appropriate child safety restraints.
- All adults including the Driver/staff must use seatbelts.
- Day care licensing regulations are followed regarding discipline of children.
- No smoking, drinking or eating by anyone is allowed on the bus.
- No inappropriate language is allowed.
- Driver/staff must be present before any child is transported.
- Children are never left alone on the bus.
- Drop off and pick up location must be consistent.
- A child will only be released to his/her parent(s) or to those persons who are listed on the Emergency and Release Information form. We must have a minimum of two people for contacts other than parent.
- Driver/staff must see parent or the designated, responsible person to pick-up or to release the child.
- Parent(s) must provide **written permission**, ahead of time, if the child is to be released to a person not listed on the Emergency and Release Information form. Written documentation must include the date, child’s name, parent’s name and signature, and a brief description of the responsible person the child is to be released to.
- The teacher or driver will request **identification** before releasing the child to anyone they have not met before.



- Driver waits two minutes at pick up/drop off location.
- If parent is not home when your child is returned, the child will be returned to center. Parents are responsible to come to the center to pick up their child. If you can not be reached, persons on the Emergency and Release Information form will be contacted. If there is no response after 45 minutes, we will contact County Social Services or Law Enforcement.
- If your child will not be riding the bus, contact your Teacher or Driver so the route can be adjusted.
- Safety training is provided for the children including vehicle evacuation drills, pedestrian safety, use of child safety restraints and proper loading and unloading procedures.
- Children's backpacks can be no larger than 10" x 13", soft sided and have no wheels.

### **“WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?”**

#### **ATTENDANCE**

- Regular attendance is necessary for your child to be successful.
- If your child has to be absent due to illness or family emergency, please call your child's classroom BEFORE the start of class. Please give us the exact reason your child is missing school. Classrooms have answering machines so you can leave a message. PLEASE NOTIFY YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER WHENEVER YOUR CHILD IS ABSENT FROM SCHOOL.
- When attendance is a concern the Teacher will:
  1. Contact the parent to determine the reason for the child's absence or missed visit.
  2. Offer encouragement, services, and support to the parent/guardian in order to maintain regular attendance.
- If attendance continues to be a concern, an Attendance Agreement will be put into place. An Attendance Agreement will include:
  1. What will happen to assure regular attendance.
  2. What will happen if there continues to be irregular attendance.
  3. Parent and Teacher will both sign and date the plan.
- If the Attendance Agreement is not followed, the family may be dropped from the program.
- Irregular attendance is defined as attendance falling below 85% attendance or missing three or more times in a two week period.

#### **BACKGROUND STUDY CHECKS**

A background study check is completed on a person who is employed, volunteers on a regular basis, and/or has direct contact with the children in the program.

#### **BEHAVIOR GUIDANCE POLICY**

In accordance with Minnesota Department of Human Services Licensing Rules, staff uses positive methods of discipline which encourage self-control, self-direction, self-esteem, and cooperation. In the event of a child's inappropriate behavior, these positive methods include:

- Redirecting the child to another activity.
- Giving the child a choice of activities.
- Working with the child on a one-to-one basis.
- Providing immediate, age appropriate consequences.

Behavior that is harmful or could cause injury to self or others will not be tolerated. Such behavior will be dealt with immediately and in an appropriate manner. The Teacher will contact the parent to share information and concern. Together, parents and teacher will plan methods to deal with the behavior and to help the child develop self-control.

Staff is prohibited from using the following means of discipline (list is not inclusive):

- Subjecting a child to corporal punishment, which includes rough handling, shoving, hair pulling, ear pulling, shaking, slapping, spanking, etc.
- Subjecting a child to emotional abuse which includes name calling, ostracism, shaming, making derogatory remarks about the child or the child's family, and using communication (yelling, sarcasm, ignoring and silence, etc.) that threatens, humiliates, or frightens the child.
- Punishment for lapses in toilet habits.
- Withholding food, light, warmth, clothing or medical care.
- Using mechanical restraints, such as tying.

If you believe staff is using inappropriate techniques, please bring it to the attention of the County Coordinator for your site.

### **CENTER CLOSING will happen when:**

- Local school system closes due to bad weather.
- Hazardous road conditions.
- Outdoor temperature falls below a safe level for young children.
- Unusual circumstances: fire, flood, heat failure, no water, etc.
- Insufficient number of staff.
- Listen to your local radio and/or television station for closings.



### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All staff and volunteers sign a confidentiality and ethics statement in order to insure that confidentiality is maintained for all children and families. Information about your child or family cannot be given out to anyone unless we have received your written permission, a court order, or child protection is involved. Please do not ask staff or volunteers about other Head Start children or families. By law, staff is prevented from sharing information to protect all families and staff.

### **DRESSING FOR HEAD START**



- Your child's day includes active and sometimes messy play. Please dress him/her in comfortable and easy to clean clothes.
- Children need to be dressed to play outside including jackets, boots, mittens and hats when the weather is cold. Because outdoor play is important, the children will go outside in temperatures down to 0 degrees.
- For health and safety reasons, children need to wear shoes and socks at the center.
- Please send an extra change of clothing to be kept at the center.

### **EMERGENCY PLAN OF ACTION**

Emergency plans are posted in each classroom. Each classroom has a First Aid Kit, Fire Extinguishers, and Emergency Exits. Emergency drills are routinely conducted.

### **END OF YEAR EVENTS**

The end-of-year event is an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the time children and families have spent in Head Start. Celebrations might include a family get together at the park or something that everyone can enjoy. Events are planned locally by teaching staff and parent groups.

## **FIELD TRIPS**

Field trips are planned for children to have a chance to learn about the community. Teachers will send out slips in advance for you to sign giving permission for your child to participate in field trips.

## **HOLIDAYS/BIRTHDAYS**

We recognize that holidays and celebrations play an important part in the lives of children and families. Classrooms will recognize holidays and events that are agreed upon by staff and parents in individual centers.

Families recognize birthdays in different ways. Our policy is that birthdays are acknowledged as a special day for each child. Teachers plan specific activities/privileges for the birthday child. "Birthday parties" will not be held in Head Start classrooms.

## **INDIVIDUAL CHILD/FAMILY FILES**

Every child will have an individual file containing pertinent information regarding the child. All children's files will be kept confidential, in a locked file. These files are open only to:

- Head Start Administrative and teaching staff
- Federal or state program staff, including Dept. of Human Services Licensing
- Child's parent(s)/legal guardians
- Upon Child Protection Court Order

Parents must give written permission if information is to be shared with other agencies/persons.

- A release is signed by the parent giving Head Start permission to forward records to the appropriate school district.

## **INSURANCE COVERAGE OF CHILDREN**

Head Start has insurance, which covers your child if there is an accident/injury while on the bus, in the classroom or while participating in any Head Start activity.

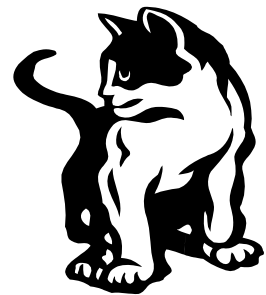
## **NO SMOKING**



- To ensure a healthy environment for your child, all Head Start facilities are smoke free. This includes classrooms, offices, parent and staff meeting rooms, outdoor play areas. Smoking is not allowed on buses, nor during field trips or home visits.

## **PETS IN THE CENTER**

- Before bringing a pet to the center, the Teacher must approve the visit. This gives the teaching staff an opportunity to notify other parents and confirm that all approve.
- Be sure to tell your Teacher if your child has an allergy to pets or a strong fear of animals.



## **PERMISSION FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS and RESEARCH**

- Written permission must be obtained from a parent/guardian before a child is involved in any research project. The permission form will be kept in the child's file at the center.
- Parents must give permission for children to be involved in public relations or media coverage. Permission for public relations, materials that promote the Head Start program like display boards,

brochures etc. is granted through completion of the Parent Agreement. Permission for media coverage will be requested separately if/when needed.

## **PROBLEM SOLVING**

Most problems are solved through talking and finding out all the facts. Should a problem arise, please:

- Call or stop by the center to set up a time to discuss your concerns with your child's Teacher. She/he will make every effort to resolve your concerns according to our Problem Solving procedure, which you will receive at the meeting.
- If this does not resolve your concerns, contact the County Coordinator for the site.
- Possible violations of Minnesota Statutes or Rules that govern our facilities could be reported by calling the Department of Human Services, Licensing Division at 651-296-3971.

*Please remember that staff will not discuss a child when the child or other children are present.*

## **RELEASING A CHILD**

- A child will only be released to his/her parent(s) or to those persons who are listed on the Emergency and Release Information form. We must have a minimum of two people for contacts other than parent.
- Driver/staff must see parent or the designated, responsible person to release the child.
- Parent(s) must provide **written permission**, ahead of time, if the child is to be released to a person not listed on the Emergency and Release Information form. Written documentation must include the date, child's name, parent's name and signature, and a brief description of the responsible person the child is to be released to.
- The teacher or driver will request **identification** before releasing the child to anyone they have not met before.
- To ensure the safety of the children, we will not release children to persons behaving in a way that poses a risk to the children or to the facility. The appropriate agency will be called if this situation arises.

## **REPORTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

- Any person may voluntarily report abuse or neglect.
- If you know or suspect that a child is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.
- Semcac Head Start staff is mandated by Minnesota law to report any suspected child abuse or neglect. If they know or have reason to believe a child is being or has been neglected or physically or sexually abused within the preceding three years, they must immediately (within 24 hours) make a report to an outside agency.
- All reports concerning suspected abuse or neglect of children occurring in a licensed facility should be made to the Department of Human Services, Licensing Division's Maltreatment Intake line at 1-651-297-4123.
- Reports regarding incidents of suspected abuse or neglect of children occurring within a family or in the community should be made to the local county social services agency or local law enforcement.

## **SEX OFFENDERS**

- Semcac Head Start does not allow convicted sex offenders to volunteer in our classrooms. This policy applies to Head Start parents who are convicted sex offenders.
- Head Start parents who are convicted sex offenders will not be allowed to come into our centers or have any contact with other children. If the parent needs to pick up her/his child, they would be allowed to do so in the parking area only.
- Volunteers (other than family members) must complete a thorough application process. A background check will be completed on each volunteer prior to service.

