Healthy Transitions: The First Few Weeks

Partnerships with healthy families and children are at the heart of all Head Start and Early Head Start Programs! Healthy children can learn better, focus on tasks longer and will miss less days of school due to illness.

Families new to our Early Head Start and Head Start program will be pleased to learn that many important health screenings will take place in the first few weeks and months of the year. Medical, dental and developmental screenings are required by the Head Start Performance Standard 1304.20 and programs must ensure each child has a source of ongoing health care.

Well visits for medical and dental include keeping vaccinations up to date, possibly a lead screening as needed, mental well-being and giving each child developmental screening.

Some children take all these screenings in stride, while others become anxious. This is perfectly normal. The teacher may read a book to the class about a doctor or dentist visit and invite other children to talk about their experiences.

Make the visit pleasant. Say hello and introduce your child. Ask to take a photo of your child and the doctor during this visit. Later, look at the photo together. Talk about how brave your child was—even though at first he or she was afraid.

Be sure to smile and shake hands with the doctor and say good bye. This way your child can see that this is a good friend and you trust this person.
What is a Developmental Assessment?

Our staff and teachers want to get to know your child well so we can understand how to help him or her learn best in our program. In the first few weeks of Head Start and Early Head Start we will share some special time with just your child and watch him or her do activities related to different areas or domains of development.

Your child’s teacher will watch how your child moves his or her body, uses his or her hands and eyes to do tasks, how he or she relates to others, gets along with friends, and how he or she talks and shares ideas. This process is called a developmental assessment.

According to the Head Start Performance Standard 1308.6(a), programs must collect information about each child for the following domains of development during a developmental assessment:

- **Gross motor skills:** physical balance and coordination movements like running, jumping, hopping etc.;
- **Fine motor skills:** hand and eye coordination movements like drawing, painting, eating, turning pages, etc.;
- **Perceptual discrimination:** being able to see or hear and understand the differences between sounds or objects that are similar;
- **Cognition:** how a child thinks, reasons, remembers and learns new things;
- **Attention skills:** how well a child can listen to a story or focus on a self chosen task;
- **Self-help:** how capable a child is of doing simple tasks to help care for his own needs, such as washing hands, pulling up pants, etc.;
- **Social and receptive skills:** how a child relates to others, understands facial expressions, and makes eye contact;
- **Expressive language:** how your child speaks and uses words to let others know his or her thoughts and ideas.

Your child’s teacher will include you in this assessment process too. You know your child best of all. We want to hear what you know your child can do. We’ll become partners and use this information to plan goals and talk about your child’s ongoing growth through out the entire year.
This is the Way We Go to School

In the first few weeks of the program year, your child’s teacher will help your child learn safety rules for walking to school and riding a bus safely.

It is important that you understand what they expect your child to know and that you reinforce these safety habits at home.

Our Head Start program takes all safety very seriously and will be happy to share more detailed information with you. Just ask us! Try these basic suggestions to get you on your way.

Use Safe Walking Habits!

1. Start a walking group! Ask other parents in your neighborhood to join you on the walk to and from school.

2. Make it a family rule! Always hold your child’s hand when walking along sidewalks, in parking lots, and crossing streets.

3. Remember, drivers cannot see young children who may be walking in front of or behind their vehicles.

4. Practice the “look-left, look-right, look-left again” rule at every corner.

5. Only use crosswalks and help your child learn to watch “Walk” and “Don’t Walk” lights.

6. Never step out between parked cars to cross a street.
Ride Safe!

We suggest that you leave a few minutes early if your child is very energetic and allow him or her some extra “run around” time—away from the street—as you walk to the bus stop. Leave your pets at home inside the house. Remember to be on time in the morning, the bus can’t wait because it is not safe for buses to sit parked in the road.

For safety reasons, parents are not allowed to board or come on the bus. A friendly Head Start bus monitor will help your child safely board and get seated on the bus. Remember, food and drinks are not allowed.

Make a point to ask the driver, bus monitor or teacher to help you if you need more ideas to help your child learn to ride safely.

Safety at the Bus Stop

Stand together and hold your child’s hand while you wait. Check that all shoes are tied and all backpack straps are secured so your child will not accidentally trip walking to the bus or climbing the steps.

While you wait for the bus together, talk about the “danger zones” around a bus. These are places where a driver cannot see any child.

- Stay 10 big steps away from the front,
- Stay 10 big steps away from the back,
- Stay 10 big steps away from both sides,
- Stay 10 big steps away from any wheels!

Your program will provide specific instructions if the bus must stop across the road from the bus stop.

The monitor and driver follow specific safe procedures in this “cross over” situation.

Remind your child when he or she is on the bus to:

- Listen to the monitor,
- Stay safely seated in the car seat or restraint system,
- Keep your hands on your own body, and use a quiet voice.

Talk about the “safe loading” rules. Remind your child to wait for a turn when the bus pulls up.

- The monitor will come down, take the child’s hand and walk to the bus door.
- The monitor will guide the child to step on first, hold the handrail and climb the bus steps.
- The monitor will help the child get safely seated in a car seat or restraint system.

Be ready and waiting at the bus stop at the end of the day to greet your child when the monitor helps him or her off the bus.