



Early Head Start



"We partner with individuals, families, and children, to address the challenges of today and build hope for the future"

"Head Start promotes the school readiness of young children from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development"

Community Action Partnership of Madison County
1001 New Market Drive
Canastota, NY 13032
(315)697-3588

Important Names and Numbers

Family Support Worker: _____

Address: 1001 New Market Drive, Canastota, NY 13032

Cell Phone Number: _____

Office Phone Number: (315) 697-3588

Other Information: _____

The Early Head Start Leadership Team:

Program Manager: **Kim Davis**

Phone Number: 315-697-3588 ext. 16

Cell Phone: 315-273-2161

Family & Health Services Coordinator: **Julie Roache**

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Education & Disabilities Coordinator: **Bonnie Peterson**

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Welcome to Early Head Start

Welcome to the Early Head Start Program of Community Action Partnership of Madison County!

We are honored that you have chosen to partner with us and look forward to working alongside you and your family. At Early Head Start, we recognize parents and caregivers as their child's first and most important teachers. Your knowledge, experiences, strengths, and goals are valued and play an essential role in your child's growth, learning, and development.

Early Head Start is built on a strong partnership between families and staff. Through open communication, mutual respect, and shared decision-making, we work together to support your child's development and your family's well-being. We encourage you to share your ideas, questions, feedback, and concerns throughout your time in the program. Your Family Support Worker is your primary partner and is available to support your family's unique needs and goals.

During weekly 90-minute home visits, you and your Family Support Worker will observe, discuss, and celebrate your child's growth and development. Together, you will plan engaging experiences and identify ways to support learning through everyday routines, play, and interactions using materials found in your home and community. Active participation during home visits helps ensure that families receive the greatest benefit from program services and support.

Our program is committed to building trusting, positive, and respectful relationships with families. We support family well-being by connecting families with community resources and assisting with access to medical, dental, mental health, and other services as needed. Through the Family Partnership Process, families may identify strengths, interests, and goals that are important to them, and staff will provide support and resources to help families work toward achieving those goals.

Early Head Start is a voluntary, comprehensive home-based program serving pregnant women, expectant families, infants, toddlers, and their families. Services are provided at no cost to eligible families through federal funding. Program hours are Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

This handbook contains information about program services, family rights and responsibilities, opportunities for family engagement and leadership, and other resources available through Early Head Start. If you have questions at any time, please contact your Family Support Worker.

We are excited to welcome you to our Early Head Start community and look forward to partnering with your family as you support your child's learning, development, and future success.

Together, we can build on your family's strengths and create opportunities for your child to thrive.



Parent Group

As an Early Head Start family, you are automatically a member of our Parent Group. Parent Group provides opportunities for families to connect with one another, share ideas, support program activities, and participate in program decision-making.

Parent Group members may:

- Help plan family events and activities
- Share ideas and feedback to strengthen program services
- Learn about child development, parenting, and community resources
- Elect parent representatives to serve on the Planning Group (Policy Council)
- Participating in leadership opportunities within the program

Your voice, experiences, and ideas are important. Family engagement is a valued part of Early Head Start, and we encourage all families to participate in ways that are meaningful and accessible to them.

Parent Group meetings are held during playgroups. We welcome and encourage your participation!

Services for Children with Disabilities and Developmental Concerns

Early Head Start is committed to ensuring all children, including children with disabilities and developmental delays, have equal access to program services and opportunities to participate fully in all activities.

We recognize that every child develops at their own pace and that families are their child's first and most important advocates. If you have questions or concerns about your child's development, your Family Support Worker and the Education and Disability Service Coordinator are available to partner with you and discuss available support and resources.

Early Head Start works collaboratively with families, community partners, and early intervention providers to support children with developmental concerns or diagnosed disabilities. With written parent consent, program staff may assist families in making referrals to the Madison County Early Intervention Program for evaluation and services.

For children who qualify for Early Intervention services, Early Head Start partners with families and service providers to support each child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). This collaboration may include:

- Supporting family-identified goals and priorities
- Participating in IFSP meetings, reviews, and revisions, when requested
- Coordinating services with Early Intervention providers
- Providing individualized accommodation and support to promote participation in program activities
- Ensuring services are provided in natural environments, including the home and community, whenever appropriate

Our goal is to create an inclusive environment where every child and family feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued.

Policy Council

The Planning Group, also known as the Policy Council, is an important part of the Early Head Start shared governance structure. Parents and community representatives work together with program leadership to provide direction and support for the program.

Planning Group members help review, discuss, and approve key program decisions, including areas such as program planning, policies, and program improvement efforts. Participation provides an opportunity to develop leadership skills, learn about program operations, and contribute to the success of Early Head Start and the families it serves.

Policy Council Membership

- Members serve one-year term
- Elections are held annually
- Parent representatives must be current parents or primary caregivers of enrolled children
- At least 51% of Policy Council membership must consist of parents or primary caregivers of currently enrolled Early Head Start children
- Community representatives are individuals who have an interest in supporting children, families, and the community.

Parent Leadership Opportunities

Serving on the Policy Council provides opportunities to:

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- Develop leadership and advocacy skills
- Learn about program governance and decision-making
- Review of program information and reports
- Represent the perspectives of families enrolled in Early Head Start
- Participate in shaping program services and continuous improvement efforts

To support participation, Policy Council members may be reimbursed for childcare and mileage expenses in accordance with program policies.

The Policy Council meets monthly. Meeting dates and times are determined with member input to encourage participation.

If you would like to serve on the Policy Council, nominate another parent, or attend a meeting as a guest, please speak with your Family Support Worker or the Program Manager. We encourage all families to explore leadership opportunities and become active partners in our program.

Family Voice and Program Improvement

At Early Head Start, we are committed to providing high-quality services that support children, families, and communities. One of the most important ways we improve our program is by listening to the families we serve.

Throughout the year, families may be invited to share feedback through surveys, phone calls, conversations, and other opportunities. Your ideas, experiences, and suggestions help us understand what is working well and identify ways we can continue to strengthen our services.

With your permission, positive comments, success stories, and family testimonials may be shared to recognize staff accomplishments, celebrate family experiences, and help community members learn about the impact of Early Head Start.

As part of our commitment to continuous learning and quality improvement, members of the leadership team may occasionally observe a home visit. The purpose of these observations is to support staff growth, ensure high-quality services, and strengthen the partnerships we build with children and families. Families will be informed when an observation is scheduled and are encouraged to share their thoughts and feedback throughout the process.

Your voice is important. By sharing your feedback, you help us create a stronger program for all children and families.

Questions, Concerns, and Program Feedback

At Early Head Start, we value open, honest, and respectful communication with families. We encourage families to share questions, concerns, suggestions, or feedback at any time. Your voice helps us strengthen our program and better meet the needs of children and families.

If you have a concern related to your child's services, home visits, program operations, or interactions with staff, we encourage you to first discuss the matter with your Family Support Worker. Many concerns can be resolved quickly through open communication and collaborative problem-solving.

If additional support is needed, families may contact the Family and Health Services Coordinator or another member of the program leadership team. Staff are committed to listening, responding respectfully, and working with families to reach a satisfactory resolution whenever possible.

Families also have the right to submit a formal complaint following the program's Complaint Procedure. A copy of this procedure can be found on page 15 of this handbook. The procedure has been reviewed and approved by the Policy Council.

Early Head Start welcomes family feedback and values opportunities to learn from the experiences of the families we serve. Families may raise questions, concerns, or suggestions without fear of discrimination, retaliation, or impact on their eligibility for services.

Partnering Through Home Visits

Home Visits

Home visits are the foundation of the Early Head Start home-based program. Through weekly visits, families and Family Support Workers work together to support children's learning, development, and family well-being.

Your Family Support Worker will schedule a 90-minute home visit with you each week. During these visits, you and your child will participate in activities, discuss your child's growth and development, celebrate successes, and plan ways to support learning through everyday routines and experiences.

Because parents and caregivers are their child's first and most important teachers, we encourage active participation throughout each home visit. Whenever possible, all parents and caregivers in the household are welcome to participate.

Home visiting services continue until your child transitions to a preschool program or reaches the age requirements established by Early Head Start regulations and program policies.

Scheduling and Attendance

Regular participation in home visits helps children and families receive the full benefit of Early Head Start services. If you need to cancel or reschedule a visit, please notify your Family Support Worker as soon as possible by phone, text message, or another agreed upon method of communication.

If multiple scheduled home visits are missed and program staff are unable to contact your family, a member of the leadership team will reach out to discuss your family's continued interest in services and identify any barriers that may be affecting participation. Our goal is to work together to support your family's ongoing engagement in the program whenever possible.

Who Should Be Present

Home visits are designed to be conducted with the enrolled child and a parent or primary caregiver. If a parent or primary caregiver is not available for the scheduled visit and only a babysitter or individual who is not responsible for the child's care is present, the visit will be rescheduled for a time when a parent or primary caregiver can participate.

When Home Visits May Be Rescheduled

Occasionally, home visits may need to be canceled or rescheduled to support the health and safety of families and staff. Reasons may include:

- Illness of a Family Support Worker
- Illness within the household that may be contagious
- Severe weather or unsafe travel conditions
- Community emergencies or other unforeseen circumstances

If possible, you will be notified as soon as possible if a visit needs to be rescheduled.

For additional information about illness-related exclusions, please refer to the section titled, **When a Child or Adult Is Too Sick.**

Weather-Related Closures and Delays

The safety of children, families, and staff is our highest priority. While Early Head Start strives to maintain regular operations, severe weather or emergency situations may require the cancellation or rescheduling of home visits and group activities.

Generally, home visits may be canceled when local school districts in your area are closed or have canceled after-school activities due to weather conditions. Delays or other weather-related changes may also affect scheduled visits.

Your Family Support Worker will contact you regarding any changes to your scheduled visit. Families are also encouraged to contact their Family Support Worker if they have questions about weather-related cancellations or delays.

Group socializations and other family activities may also be canceled due to severe weather or emergency conditions. Families will be notified by phone, text message, or another agreed-upon communication method if a cancellation occurs.

School closures for reasons unrelated to weather or emergency conditions, such as holidays, school breaks, or building maintenance, do not typically affect Early Head Start home visit schedules.

Staff Qualifications and Background Checks

Staff Qualifications and Background Checks

The safety and well-being of children and families are a top priority at Early Head Start.

All employees complete required background checks before beginning employment and before having contact with enrolled children and families. Staff must also meet ongoing federal, state, and program requirements to maintain their eligibility to work in the program. Background checks are conducted in accordance with Head Start and agency policies and are repeated as required.

Through these practices, Early Head Start strives to provide families with a safe, trustworthy, and supportive environment.

Supporting Your Child's Learning and Development

Curriculum

Early Head Start uses the **Growing Great Kids® Next Generation (GGK)** and **Growing Great Families® (GGF)** curricula to support children's development, strengthen family relationships, and promote family well-being.

These research-based curricula focus on:

- Building strong parent-child relationships
- Supporting healthy child development
- Strengthening family protective factors
- Promoting positive parenting practices
- Supporting family well-being and resilience
- Encouraging healthy growth and development

During home visits, you and your Family Support Worker will work together to explore topics that support your child's development and your family's goals. Home visit experiences are individualized to reflect your child's unique strengths, interests, developmental progress, and family priorities.

Topics may include:

- Child development and learning
- Social-emotional development
- Infant and toddler behavior

- Parent-child interactions
- Health and wellness
- Family relationships
- Family strengths and goals

Together, you and your Family Support Worker will plan meaningful experiences that support your child's learning through everyday routines, play, and family interactions.

Group Socializations (Playgroups)

Families enrolled in Early Head Start are encouraged to participate in group socializations, sometimes referred to as playgroups.

Group socializations provide opportunities for children and families to build relationships, learn together, and connect with other families in the program. These experiences support child development, family engagement, and positive parent-child relationships.

During group socializations, families can:

- Play, learn, and explore alongside their child
- Participate in developmentally appropriate activities
- Build relationships with other families
- Share experiences and ideas with peers
- Learn about child development and community resources
- Enjoy healthy meals or snacks together

Group socializations are planned to support children's development and learning and are aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. These experiences help children develop social skills, explore new environments, and learn through play.

Families are encouraged to share ideas and provide input when planning future group socializations. Parent leadership and participation help ensure activities are meaningful and responsive to family interests and needs.

Group socializations are generally offered twice each month at locations throughout Madison County.

Active Supervision

Parents and caregivers are responsible for supervising their children during group socializations. Active supervision helps create a safe environment by maintaining focused attention, anticipating potential risks, and supporting children as they explore and learn.

Food and Nutrition

To support the health and safety of all participants, outside food and beverages should not be brought to group socializations unless approved as part of an accommodation or individual feeding plan.

Healthy snacks and meals are provided as appropriate. Formula is available for infants when needed. Accommodation is available for food allergies, dietary restrictions, and individual nutritional needs. Please notify your Family Support Worker if your child requires any accommodation.

Siblings

Siblings are welcome to attend group socializations when appropriate. School-age children may attend when school is not in session.

Supporting Early Head Start Through In-Kind Contributions

Family Contributions and In-Kind Support

Early Head Start is funded through a partnership between federal funding and local community support. One-way communities support the program through **in-kind contributions**, also called **non-federal share**.

In-kind contributions may include:

- Parent and caregiver participation in home learning activities
- Volunteer time
- Donated materials or supplies
- Community partnerships and services that benefit the program

As your child's first and most important teacher, the time you spend supporting learning throughout the day is valuable. Reading together, talking during daily routines, playing, exploring, and practicing new skills all contribute to your child's growth and development.

Families may be asked to share information about the time they spend participating in program-related learning activities with their child. These activities may be documented as part of the program's in-kind contribution requirements.

Thank you for partnering with Early Head Start and supporting your child's learning, development, and future success through the meaningful experiences you share together every day.

Program Events and Family Activities

Program Events and Family Activities

In addition to home visits and group socializations, Early Head Start offers a variety of family events, educational opportunities, and community activities throughout the year.

These events are designed to support family well-being, strengthen parent-child relationships, build connections among families, and provide opportunities for learning, fun, and community engagement.

Families will receive information about upcoming events from their Family Support Worker. Activities may include:

- Family celebrations and community gatherings
- Parent education workshops
- Health and safety events
- Child development activities
- Literacy and school readiness events
- Family engagement opportunities
- Special presentations and community partner events

Examples of past events have included child safety identification programs, family picnics, interactive performances, and other activities designed to bring families together and support children's learning and development.

We encourage all families to participate in events and activities that are meaningful and enjoyable for their family.

Staying Connected

Your Family Support Worker is an important partner throughout your Early Head Start experience and is available to answer questions, provide resources, and offer support.

If you have questions about program services, child development, community resources, family goals, or other topics, please reach out to your Family Support Worker. We are here to help.

At Early Head Start, we believe families are valuable partners in program planning and improvement. We welcome your ideas, suggestions, and feedback and encourage you to share them with program staff at any time.

Together, we can build on your family's strengths and create meaningful opportunities for children and families to learn, grow, and thrive.

Welcome to Our Early Head Start Community

Thank you for choosing Early Head Start. We are honored to partner with your family and look forward to supporting your child's learning, development, and success. Together, we will build strong relationships, celebrate growth, and create positive experiences for children and families throughout your Early Head Start journey.

Interested in joining or learning more about the Planning Group/Policy Council?

Please contact your Family Support Worker for more information.
Food and childcare (or reimbursement for childcare) are provided.
We look forward to new faces, ideas, and opinions.

When a Child or Adult Is Too Sick to Participate

Our team looks forward to seeing families during home visits, group socializations, and special program events. To help protect the health and safety of children, families, and staff, there may be times when a home visit needs to be rescheduled or when a family should stay home from a program activity due to illness. Staff follow the same health and safety expectations.

The following guidelines are provided to help families decide when to participate and when to cancel or reschedule. These guidelines are not a substitute for medical advice. If you have concerns about your health, your child's health, or the health of someone in your household, please contact your health care provider.

Please cancel a home visit or stay home from playgroups, group socializations, or program events when a child or adult:

- Does not feel well enough to participate comfortably in program activities
- Needs a level of care or attention that would interfere with safe participation in the visit or activity
- Has symptoms that may spread illness to others, unless a health care provider determines the person may participate and is not contagious

Symptoms that may require canceling or staying home include:

- Fever with change of behavior or other signs of illness, such as appearing unusually tired, uncomfortable, or unable to participate
- Symptoms of possible serious illness, including persistent crying, unusual irritability, uncontrolled coughing, difficulty breathing, wheezing, lethargy, or a rapidly spreading rash
- Diarrhea that is different from the child's usual stool pattern, including increased frequency, loose or watery stools, stools that cannot be contained in a diaper, or accidents when the child usually uses the toilet
- Vomiting more than once in the previous 24 hours
- Mouth sores with drooling
- Rash with fever or behavior change
- Skin sores that are draining fluid and cannot be covered

Communicable illnesses: Please cancel a home visit and do not attend group activities if a health care provider has diagnosed you, your child, or someone in your household with a communicable illness until the person has been treated, cleared by a health care provider, or is no longer contagious according to medical or public health guidance.

- Campylobacter, C. difficile, Cryptosporidiosis, E. coli, Giardiasis, Norovirus, Rotavirus, Salmonella, or Shigella: follow health care provider or public health guidance before returning to program activities
- Chickenpox: return when lesions have crusted over or when cleared by a health care provider
- COVID-19 or other respiratory illness: return when symptoms are improving and the person has been fever-free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication, unless otherwise directed by a health care provider or public health guidance
- Hemophilus influenzae type B, meningitis, measles, mumps, rubella, tuberculosis, or whooping cough: return only when cleared by a health care provider or public health authority

- Hand, foot, and mouth disease: return when there is no fever and mouth sores or drooling no longer prevent safe participation
- Hepatitis A or Hepatitis B: follow health care provider or public health guidance before returning
- Herpes with open sores, impetigo, infectious conjunctivitis/pinkeye with eye discharge, shingles, or strep throat: return when treatment has begun, sores or drainage are covered or resolved as appropriate, and the person is no longer considered contagious

Early Head Start may request medical clearance before a child or adult returns to home visits, group socializations, playgroups, or program events when needed to protect the health and safety of children, families, and staff.

In the event of a health emergency, please call 9-1-1.

Complaint Procedures and Parent and Community Concerns

Parent Involvement

The Early Head Start program encourages parents and community residents to bring to their attention any concerns or complaints regarding the program.

Procedure

First Step: Contact the family support worker, FSW, with the complaint or concern. The home visitor will take the appropriate steps to address the concern. If the complaint or concern is not resolved, the parent or community resident may take the next step.

Second Step: Contact the Family and Health Services Coordinator regarding the complaint or concern. The Family and Health Services Coordinator will respond within five (5) working days. If the complaint/concern is not resolved, the next step may be taken.

Third Step: For families enrolled in Early Head Start, a written complaint or concern is sent to the Early Head Start Planning Committee. The Planning Committee must respond in writing to the complaint or concern within 30 working days.

Fourth Step: The written complaint or concern is sent to the Executive Director. A written response to the complaint is sent to the parent or community resident within 45 working days.

Exception to Procedure

The steps above may be altered when the person designated to handle the complaint or concern is directly involved in the complaint or concern. In this case, the complaint or concern is addressed to the person noted in the next step and the remaining steps are followed in the order set forth above.

Family and Program Resources

Good2Know Network: [Enhancing Social-Emotional Skill Development with Music - good2know](#)

This is a supplemental music and movement resource that supports parent-child interactions, social and emotional development, and learning through play, consistent with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

Little Free Libraries: Did you know that the Early Head Start Program of Madison County supports three little free libraries? A Little Free Library is a free book-sharing box where anyone may take a book or share a book. They function on the honor system. You do not need to share a book to take one. If you take a book or two from a little library, try to bring some to share to that same library, or another in your area, when you can. (Tip: use [Little Free Library's mobile app](#) to easily find libraries near you!) Locations:

Canastota – CAP office – 1001 New Market Drive

Oneida – CAP WIC office - 1072 Northside Shopping Center

Morrisville – CAP office – 3 East Main Street

Parent Lending Library: We are so excited to let you know that we have a lending library just for you! We have a variety of books that you can borrow just by asking your FSW to bring them to you.

We have books about parenting, nutrition, physical activity, biting, and more.

To sign out a book, let your Family Support Worker know which one you would like to borrow and they will bring it to your next home visit. Keep it for a week, two, or even three. When you are done, return the book to your Family Support Worker for someone else to use.

Family Home Cooking w/ EHS: Each month your Family Support Worker will collect a recipe from the family, and we will provide a cookbook for each family at the end of the program year.

Pathways Wellness Center: They are staffed by Peer Specialist who have “lived experience” with mental health conditions and are in recovery.

Their supports:

- Individual Peer Support
- Health & Wellness Planning
- Peer-Run Groups & Activities
- Community Events
- Connections to Community Resources

Social Care Network: If you are enrolled in Medicaid and you or your family are looking for support, help is out there for you. Our Social Care Network can connect you to social needs services, including:

- Housing
- Nutrition
- Employment
- Education
- Transportation

Our team is focused on getting you the support you need. Take the first step by giving us a call today at 315-897-2646 or emailing info@capmadco.org.