

Parent Handbook

Northwest Montana Head



Northwest Montana Head Start promotes the well-being and self-sufficiency of children and their whole family by providing opportunities in a nurturing environment.



An equal opportunity employer and provider



NWMT Head Start Board of Directors, staff and families collaborate with community agencies to provide quality services that empower families and advocate for children.

NWMT Head Start is focused on strengthening the social, nutritional, emotional, physical and educational well-being of the whole family.

NWMT Head Start strives to create positive and fulfilling environments, thereby encouraging the continuity of qualified, competent staff.

School readiness is a strong focus at NWMT Head Start. While children and families are at Head Start we build a partnership with them to make a successful transition to kindergarten and for later learning and life skills.

As parents, you are the first and most important teachers of your children.

We encourage you to participate in our program. We offer opportunities for you to become involved in classroom activities, develop center programs, and in the decision making of program and operations. We are hopeful that your experiences in Head Start will enhance your parenting and decision making skills.

What is Head Start?

Head Start receives funding from a federal grant to provide preschool services for eligible children and support for their families.

Northwest Montana Head Start provides the following services and programs:

- Education
- Family Services
- Health Services
- Nutrition Services
- Mental Health Services
- Family Involvement
- Educational Trainings
- Services to children with disabilities
- Referrals To Community Agencies

Program Governance and Administration

Board of Directors (BOD): Has legal and financial responsibility for the program and consists of professional community members who volunteer their time at Head Start.

Policy Council (PC): Helps with program planning, program activities, curriculum, policies, grants, and staff employment decisions. The PC is made up of Parent Center Committee elected family members from each classroom, and volunteer community representatives.

Parent Center Committee (PCC): ALL families are members, and everyone is invited. PCC helps plan family events, special guest speakers, lesson plans, and much more!

Northwest Montana Head Start Centers and Locations

<u>Program Hours and Locations</u>		
Location	Hours	Days
<p>Kalispell 79 7th Avenue East North Kalispell, MT 59901 Phone 406.752.7011 Fax 406.755.1916</p>	<p><u>Morning</u> 8:00-12:00 <u>Afternoon</u> 12:30-4:30 <u>Full Day</u> 8:15-3:45</p>	<p>Monday-Thursday</p>
<p>North Valley 80 Railroad Street Columbia Falls, MT 59912 Phone 406.892.4144 Fax 406.897.1014</p>	<p><u>Full Day</u> 8:15-3:45 <u>Full Day</u> 8:15-3:45</p>	<p>Monday-Thursday</p>
<p>Tobacco Valley Classes 335 6th Street East Room #113 Eureka, MT 59917 Phone: 406.297.5507</p>	<p><u>Full Day</u> 8:00-3:30</p>	<p>Monday-Thursday</p>

Transferring Centers:

Visit with your teacher advocate or contact the administration office and speak to the Family Services manager if you are in need of a class transfer.

Program Information

Picking up and Releasing Children:

- ◆ Children will **ONLY** be released to those listed on the Emergency Contact form.
- ◆ Head Start requires a show of **PHOTO ID** for child pick up.
- ◆ **Head Start will not accept verbal permission for the pickup of a child for anyone that is not listed on the Emergency Contact form.**
- ◆ **Families are to keep addresses and phone numbers up-to-date with Head Start at all times.** A form must be filled out **in writing** with any changes on a **Change of Information Form.**
- ◆ Children must be picked up on time at the center. Families are to contact the center if you will be late.
- ◆ Classroom doors will open 10 minutes before the end of the scheduled class times.
- ◆ If the child is not picked up on time, and all possible contacts have been called without success, **Child and Family Services will be called.**

Court Orders:

If there are court orders involving child custody a copy of the court order **MUST** be in the child's file at Head Start. **We cannot prohibit contact with either parent without current court orders.**

Tardiness:

Your child's tardiness impacts their learning and the routine of the classroom. Children must be in their classrooms within 15 minutes of the start of class time. Classroom doors will open 10 minutes before scheduled class times begin.

If your child is chronically late, we will arrange a meeting to develop a plan to ensure your child is coming to school on time. If your child continues to be late, determination whether Head start is an appropriate option for the family will be made.

Parking:

Parking on the grass, in staff parking, and in the fire lanes is not permitted. When picking up or dropping off children at Head Start center locations, **children are to not be left unattended in your vehicle.**

Cell Phones:

Cell phone use is not permitted in the school building. Head Start staff would like to visit with you about your child's day, and it is much easier to do without the distraction of cell phones.

Drug Free Environment:

- The use of alcohol, illegal drugs, and/or tobacco and e-cigarettes are not allowed at any of Northwest Montana Head Start Centers or family events.
- Smoking at family activity events, parent trainings, the parking lot, and all Head Start property is not allowed.
- If families are expressing signs of intoxication such as smelling of alcohol or other substances, displaying unusual behaviors, and/or displaying behaviors that lead the staff member to believe the child will not be safe, staff will call and report this to the appropriate authorities.

Child Abuse/Neglect Reporting:

MT State law requires Head Start staff to report any suspected abuse or neglect to Child and Family Services. Head Start staff is trained annually regarding what to look for and report. Head Start will provide support to the family through the required steps.

Fire Drills and Lockdowns:

Head Start practices lockdown and fire drills once a month to be prepared in the event of an emergency.

Weapons:

Possession of firearms, handguns, or any related items, weapons, or materials while on NWMT Head Start premises, or on activities/field trips that are away from the centers is strictly prohibited.



Facility Security:

All Head Start centers utilize video and audio cameras for training and security purposes. Classroom doors remain locked during class hours. Visitors need to check in at the designated area of each center before they are allowed further access into the classrooms.

Locked Facility:

Northwest Montana Head Start is a locked facility for the safety of our staff, students, and families. Doors will be unlocked during drop off and pick up times, and will be locked the remainder of the time. If you have to pick up your child outside of normal drop off and pick up times, please press the intercom button to the right of the door and be ready to show your picture ID, you will then will be

Family Concerns or Comments:

We help to solve any issue as directly as possible. We encourage open communication between the person with the concern and the staff member to resolve the issue. If this does not work, families



Child Management at the Center:

Spanking, slapping, yanking, or name-calling of children is not allowed in any NWMT Head Start facilities or on the grounds by anyone, **including the child's parents**. If this behavior is witnessed, necessary action will be taken. Parents are responsible for the supervision and behavior of their children, including siblings, at drop off and pick up times. Children are to be supervised at all times.

Pets:

Animals are not allowed at Head Start centers with the exception of service dogs, which will be allowed with prior notice.

Holiday Celebration:

Head Start staff will acknowledge children's thoughts and ideas about holidays, but holidays will not be celebrated in the classroom.

Education

Head Start is designed to meet each child's individual and school readiness needs. Every child is offered a variety of learning experiences designed to help them develop in the following areas:

Physical development	Personal safety	Language
Literacy	Math	Science
Creative Arts	Approaches to learning	Health and nutrition
Cognition and general knowledge	Social\emotional development	Self-help skills



Creative Curriculum

Creative Curriculum is a developmentally-appropriate, research-based curricula that supports the learning experience of preschool age children.

Creative Curriculum offers small and large group activities giving children opportunities to explore, experiment, and play to develop academically, socially, physically and emotionally.

Some of the centers you may see in the classroom are:

- ◆ Blocks
- ◆ Math
- ◆ Science
- ◆ Books
- ◆ Dramatic Play
- ◆ Sensory
- ◆ Art
- ◆ Writing
- ◆ Sensory
- ◆ Music and Movement

Getting Ready for Kindergarten

Getting Ready for Kindergarten

The transition to kindergarten can be a time of great excitement and joy for everyone involved. For children, it is an opportunity to learn new things, master new skills, and proudly declare, “I’m going to Kindergarten.” For families, it can bring a sense of delight as their children reach another milestone. For Head Start educators, it is a time to reflect on the progress the children have made. There are steps that we will ask families to take to help get ready for the transition to kindergarten.

Transition Paperwork

This includes information about your child’s time at Head Start. With your permission, we can share this with your child’s kindergarten teacher. You will fill this paperwork out with your child’s teacher at the last conference of the year.



Enrolling For Kindergarten

You will need a copy of your child’s birth certificate and an updated immunization record for the school. Ask your Teacher Advocate or Family Advocate about Kindergarten Round Up dates!

Classroom Size

Head Start classrooms consist of 18-20 children per classroom.

Each classroom will have a minimum of a Teacher and an Assistant Teacher.

Some classrooms will also have Classroom Aides or other parent or community volunteers present in the classroom.

Discipline

Head Start uses positive discipline to teach children problem solving, language, and social skills.

The way Head Start staff applies this is through:

- ◆Redirection ◆Positive Language ◆Respect
- ◆Setting Clear Limits ◆2 Choice Discipline
- ◆Clear and Concise classroom rule



Outcomes

Teachers work with your child and complete checklists, rating scales, and record observations throughout the year.

Results from these assessments are shared with you during home visits and parent teacher conferences. The assessment information is used to help create educational goals and plan classroom experiences based on your child's strengths, needs, and interests.

Screenings

Head Start is mandated to provide health and developmental screenings to all children enrolled in our program. Results of your child's screenings will be provided to you but are otherwise kept confidential.

- ◆Speech and language
- ◆Developmental skills
- ◆Hearing/vision
- ◆Height/weight
- ◆Social emotional development

Outside Play

The playground is an extension of the classroom. Outdoor play is an important part of Our Early Childhood Education curriculum.

Children will go outside daily except when temperatures are colder than 15 degrees or in stormy weather.

For outside play:

- ◆ Wear comfortable, washable play clothes. Bring an extra set of clothes to leave at the center or in your child's backpack.
- ◆ Wear shoes that are appropriate for running, climbing, and playing.
- ◆ Dress for the weather, including hats, mittens and boots. Please label all clothing!
- ◆ Apply sunscreen to your child before they come to school. It is a program policy that we DO NOT apply sunscreen to children at school. Sunscreen will be provided for parents/guardians to apply.
- ◆ If your child is too sick to go outside, then your child is too sick to come to school.



Social Emotional Development

NWMTHS provides supports for positive behavior management and learning environments for all children including those with social, emotional, and mental health needs. Children participate in social emotional and positive behavior curriculum within the classroom.

Mental Health Specialist

The Mental Health Specialist works with parents and teachers when there are concerns about a child's social-emotional skills or behavior.

The Mental Health Specialist can offer resources, referrals and develop an individual behavior management plan for a child that may need additional classroom supports.



Disabilities Manager

The Disabilities Manager oversees developmental screenings and coordinates with speech, occupational, and physical therapists to facilitate therapy for those who are eligible for these services. Head Start works closely with local school districts and other agencies to provide services. The Disabilities Manager coordinates this communication to support any child with an IEP or IFSP and facilitates the referral to local schools if a concern is identified.



Daily Meals and Snacks

Head Start participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and Summer Food Service Program (for summer camp).

Head Start will make accommodations for allergies. An allergy form, completed by your child's medical provider, is needed in order for Head Start to provide necessary food substitutions.

Head Start will post food and environmental allergies children have on the 'Allergy Alert' that is posted in the classroom and kitchen.



- ◆ Children that come to school in the morning will receive breakfast and lunch.
- ◆ Children that come to school in the afternoon will receive lunch and pm snack.
- ◆ Children who are in the full day classroom will receive breakfast, lunch

Outside Food and Beverage



Outside food and beverages may not be brought into the classroom or left in your child's cubby.

Due to health concerns including: allergies, food sensitivities, and nutritional content, we must restrict food prepared off site. We will not allow **ANY OUTSIDE FOOD** to be brought into the center. In addition, we do not allow outside food or drinks, besides water, for teachers, parents, volunteers or any other staff in the classrooms (including coffee and soda).

Ellyn Satter

NWMT promotes healthy food choices. Children learn and practice **Family Style Dining** at the table when they serve and pour for themselves, pass foods and take part in conversations. We trust children to manage their own eating. They are allowed to eat at their own pace and ask for more if they are still hungry. During mealtimes in the classroom, children are encouraged to try new foods. Children eat different foods at school than they may at home and learn about new foods through monthly nutrition activities.



Our program participates in Montana Harvest of the Month. The Montana Harvest of the Month program showcases Montana grown foods in Montana schools and communities. Each month, one locally grown item (e.g., winter squash) is served at least once for lunch or snack. The goals for this program are to expose children and adults to new, healthy foods and to support Montana's farmers and ranchers.



Health Services

Your child's health impacts their total development and ability to benefit from the Head Start experience. Our program works closely with families to make sure that each child in the program is healthy, that preventative measures are taken, and that follow-up treatment and services are received for any health condition found.

Dental Exams

It is a Head Start requirement that all enrolled children have proof of a current dental exam.

The American Dental Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics say that every child should visit a dentist by age 1 or as soon as the first tooth appears. This visit teaches parents and caregivers how to care for their children's teeth and help them remain cavity-free. As part of her dental checkup the dentist will make sure all teeth are developing normally and that there are no dental problems and give you further advice on proper hygiene.



Lead Level Testing

Blood lead level test result completed at or after 24 months of age.

Well Child

It is a Head Start requirement that all enrolled children have proof of a current well child exam.

Parents often take their child to the doctor when they are sick but yearly visits are just as important.

The benefits of yearly Well Child Checks are:

- ◆ Tracking growth and development. See how much your child has grown in the time since your last visit, and talk with your doctor about your child's development. You can discuss your child's milestones, social behaviors and learning.
- ◆ Raising concerns. Make a list of topics you want to talk about with your child's pediatrician such as development, behavior, sleep, eating or getting along with other family members. Bring your top three to five questions or concerns with you to talk with your pediatrician at the start of the visit.
- ◆ Team approach. Regular visits create strong, trustworthy relationships among pediatrician, parent and child.



Family Support

Head Start supports the child enrolled in Head Start as well as families in their growth and development. The Head Start program serves as a link between families and the community.

Your child's Teacher Advocate and Family Advocate can help your family in some of the following ways:

- ◆ Assist your family in obtaining the health requirements.
- ◆ Support your family in goal setting and overcoming challenges.
- ◆ Inform families of various community resources and how to access them.
- ◆ Encourage family involvement by volunteering in the program.
- ◆ Help in crisis or emergency situation.
- ◆ Help to obtain special Head Start services, such as helping families learn about nutrition, good health, childhood development, and more.
- ◆ Keep families informed of volunteer and employment opportunities at Head Start.
- ◆ Work with families to develop a plan to ensure good attendance.
- ◆ Provide information about early childhood development.

Home Visits and Family Teacher Conferences

Head Starts' philosophy is to promote a partnership is to offer support and enhance learning at home as well as school. Families are expected to participate in all home visits and conferences with their Teacher Advocate and Family Advocate during the school year.

The visits provide many opportunities for families and teachers such as:

- ◆ Develop/share individualized goals for the child and family
- ◆ Share observations and progress about the child's strengths, needs, and interests
- ◆ Learn about classroom schedule and activities

Family Engagement

Head Start is designed to support families as the most important influence in their child's life. Head Start encourages families to become actively involved in their child's education, including direct involvement in decision making groups at Head Start.

Parent Center Committee (PCC)

ALL families are members and everyone is invited. PCC helps plan Family Fun Nights, special guest speakers, lesson plans, field trips, cooking projects, and much more.



Policy Council (PC)

The PC assists with program planning, activities, curriculum, policies, grants, and staff employment decisions. The PC is made up of elected family members from each classroom, as well as community representatives.

Family Activities

This includes workshops, family fun nights, read and feeds, trainings, and other activities.

Volunteering

There are many components to Head Start that families are encouraged and expected to participate in such as: organizing, cleaning, helping in classrooms, helping with classroom prep, putting take and makes together, making bulletin boards, and many other things!

Ask your Teacher Advocate or Family Advocate for more opportunities



In kind

For every dollar we receive from our Federal Grant, we need to collect 20 cents in donated time, goods, or services. This is what we refer to as “In-kind”.

Help Us Meet Our Goal

Each year, our program works hard to meet our in kind goals. We can't do it without your help. We collect in kind from donations, volunteer time, and partnering with families. We appreciate your time!

Examples of in kind donations

- ◆ Volunteering in the classroom
- ◆ Completing take home activities
- ◆ Prepare classroom activities at home or the center
- ◆ Participate in planning events, trainings, and activities
- ◆ Ask your Teacher Advocate for more ideas!

GOAL
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Individualized Education Goal Tracker, Literacy Trackers and Take and Makes

You are your child's first teacher.



Individualized Education Goal Tracker, Literacy Trackers and Take and Make activities are sent home to encourage family and child interaction. The activities are focused on kindergarten readiness skills as well as the goals you have set with your Teacher Advocate. Families keep track of the time they spend completing the activities, as well as time spent reading as a family and return the Literacy Trackers and Take and Makes to their Teacher Advocate.

Attendance

Head Start federal guidelines state that children are required to maintain 85% attendance. That is no more than 2 days absent per month.

Northwest Montana Head Start provides high-quality early childhood education that develops cognitive, social and emotional skills.

- ◆ If children are not attending school on a regular basis, they are not receiving the full benefits from the program.
- ◆ Teacher Advocates prepare lesson plans and activities daily which means your child is missing out on valuable learning experiences.
- ◆ It is hard for children to learn the routines and the schedule in the classroom if they are frequently absent.
- ◆ Practicing good attendance now helps children establish appropriate and healthy attendance habits and routines for their continuing education.

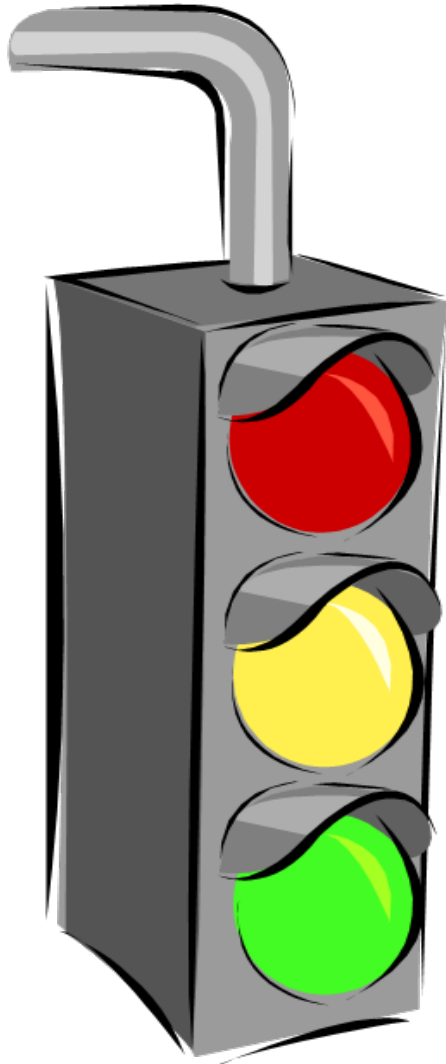
Attendance Procedure

- ◆ Call the center every day your child is absent. **It is your responsibility to call the center.**
- ◆ If we do not hear from you within one hour we will prompt you with a text message to call us.
- ◆ After two unexcused absences, with no communication or direct contact from the child's family, a Teacher Advocate will conduct a home visit
- ◆ After two unexcused absences in one month, or if the child falls below 85% attendance, a letter will be sent to the family specifying the attendance policy. If attendance does not improve, we will have an attendance meeting to develop a plan to improve attendance.
- ◆ After eight consecutive unexcused absences with no contact with the family, a child's slot in the program will be considered vacant.
- ◆ Any planned absence of 4 or more days needs prior notice and permission with in writing with a return date.

IS YOUR CHILD WELL ENOUGH TO BE IN SCHOOL TODAY?



Use this guide to help you determine when to send your child to school:



Fever over 100 degrees
Open/infected sores not easily covered
Vomiting more than twice in 24 hours
Diarrhea
Earache

Runny nose
Cough
Rash

Feeling well today

Attendance:

In order for your child to get the most out of Head Start, he/she must attend daily.

If your child is sick or unable to attend class, call Head Start right away.

Working together to keep children, families, and staff healthy!

Family Relations

To keep Head Start a positive environment for children, staff and families, please act in a non-disruptive respectful manner.

If there are concerns about staff or families, please talk to the staff member or family at a time that does not disrupt the classroom or Head Start business. You may also fill out a Family/Community Comment Form.

Staff members may ask a family to leave the setting if they believe the situation is inappropriate or disruptive. Staff may refer the incident to the Director or other appropriate authorities, if a family does not comply with the request to leave.

Family Comments or Concerns

We help to solve any issue as directly as possible. We encourage open communication between the person with the concern and the staff member to resolve the issue. If this does not work, families should contact the department supervisor. Families are able to have a staff member present during the process.

AREA OF CONCERN:	FIRST TALK TO:	IF NOT SATISFIED, THEN TALK TO:
Classroom	Education Manager	Director
Family Services or Family	Family Services Manager	Director
Transportation	Family Services Manager	Director
Nutrition or Health	Health-Nutrition Manager	Director
Developmental Concerns	Disabilities Manager	Director
Behavioral Concerns and Men-	Mental Health Specialist	Director
Management	Director	Board of Directors Chair
Director	Board of Directors Chair	

Northwest Montana Head Start is committed to ensuring the safety of children, families, visitors, and staff in all our centers. In order to maintain an open, safe, respectful and positive for children, staff, and families it is essential that everyone is aware of their responsibilities and adhere to the Northwest Montana Head Start Family



Conduct Policy FS18 below.

POLICY: Head Start will provide a safe, positive environment for children, staff and parents.

- I. **Families are expected to act in a non-disruptive and non-threatening manner.**
 - A. If families have concerns with staff or other families they should talk to the staff member or family at an appropriate time that is not disruptive to classroom routine or other Head Start business.
 - B. Families will follow the family complaint process described in the Family Orientation
 - C. All types of weapons are prohibited on agency premises, at events sponsored by the agency, and at bus stops (see also PP 45).
- II. **Staff members are permitted to ask a family to leave the setting if they believe the situation is disruptive or inappropriate or may refer the situation to the Director or other appropriate authorities.**
 - A. When a family has demonstrated behavior that is disruptive or threatening towards staff, other families, or the program, staff is encouraged to first speak directly to the family.
 - B. If speaking directly to the family would be counter productive, unsafe, or does not produce a positive result, the staff member may complete a Staff Comment Form.
 - C. The Staff Comment Form is given to the Family Services Manager with a copy to the Director.
 - D. The Family Services Manager will gather the facts and contact the family for their input and contact the staff member's supervisor.
 - E. If the staff member is found at fault, their supervisor will address their conduct. If the family is at fault, there is a progression of steps that can be taken.
 - F. Steps to promote a positive resolution include mediation, a referral for family assistance, a written/signed statement of proper family conduct, and a written/signed family conduct plan.
 - G. If a parent refuses to comply, the parent's access to staff and the program may be limited.

“And Justice For All...”

In accordance with Federal 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, age, disability, and reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) 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. Additionally, program information is available in languages other than English.

To file a complaint alleging discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at: http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html OR at any USDA office OR write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410
- (2) Fax: (202) 690-7442
- (3) Email: program.intake@usda.gov.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.