



# Agency Referral Guide for Young Children With Disabilities



# SCHOOL READINESS STARTS HERE.



## Who is Head Start for?

### Children

Head Start/Early Head Start is fun and educational. It provides infants, toddlers and preschoolers with a chance to improve their skills and enhance their self-image. Children are provided with the opportunity to explore, experiment and discover interesting new ideas. Head Start/Early Head Start children grow socially, emotionally and cognitively as they make new friends and learn to value and enjoy the differences among them. **Children with disabilities are especially welcome.** We provide special education services in an inclusive classroom setting. Goals on a child's Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individual Education Plan (IEP) are incorporated into the child's Head Start Education experience. ABCD Head Start & Children's Services is proud of its inclusive classrooms so that all enrolled children with special education needs receive quality services in a least restrictive environment. ABCD Head Start provides services for over 200 children with disabilities throughout Boston, Malden and Everett.

### Parents

Parents are the most important influence on a child's development. Parents and teachers work together to plan educational goals for their children. An essential part of our program is the involvement of parents in program planning and operating activities. **Many serve as members of the Parent Policy Council and local program parent committees,** where they have a voice in program design. Parents also volunteer in classrooms, on the playground, field-trips, during meal times and more. Parents receive preference for employment in Head Start for job opportunities that they qualify for. Through participation in classes and workshops on child development and through staff visits to the home, parents learn about the needs of their children and about educational activities that can be carried out at home.

## About ABCD

A Massachusetts-based non-profit human services organization, ABCD provides low-income residents in the Boston and Mystic Valley areas with the tools, support, and resources they need to transition from poverty to stability and from stability to success. Each year, we've served more than 100,000 individuals, elders and families through a broad range of innovative initiatives as well as long-established, proven programs and services. For more than 50 years, ABCD has been deeply rooted in each neighborhood we serve, empowering individuals and families and supporting them in their quest to live with dignity and achieve their highest potential. For more, please visit [bostonabcd.org](http://bostonabcd.org).

### Disabilities/Mental Health Coordinator

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## Who is Eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start?

In Boston ABCD Head Start & Early Head Start center-based programs serve children from four weeks to five years of age who reside in the city and meet income eligibility guidelines. ABCD Head Start & Children's Services also operates centers in Malden and Everett for children ages three to five years who live in the communities of Malden, Medford, Everett, Stoneham, Melrose, Reading, Wakefield, North Reading and Winchester and meet income eligibility guidelines. As an inclusive program, ABCD Head Start & Children's Services enrolls infants, toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities in its integrated Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms.

### *Who refers children with disabilities to Head Start/Early Head Start?*

Referrals can be made by parents, early intervention programs, neighborhood health centers, hospitals, clinics, the Department of Children and Families and other service providers.

### *How is the referral process initiated?*

The agency representative should contact the Head Start/Early Head Start Disabilities/Mental Health Coordinator at the Central Office. The Coordinator will ask for information on the needs of the child and family in order to make an initial assessment of services available at the local Head Start/Early Head Start program. If Head Start/Early Head Start can offer potential placement for the child, the Coordinator at the Central Office will provide the information to the appropriate staff at the Head Start/Early Head Start program and will inform the center of the referral in order to start the application process.

## What services are offered for children with disabilities?

- Every Child receives a variety of learning experiences to foster intellectual, social, and emotional growth in an inclusive setting. Children participate in indoor and outdoor play and are introduced to the concepts of words and numbers. They are encouraged to express their feelings and to develop self-confidence and the ability to get along with others.
- A curriculum designed to meet the individual needs of the child.
- Every program has an Intervention Support Specialist who provides consultation to classroom teachers, parent education and support, coordination of BPS and EI services, and referral for evaluation as appropriate.
- Establishing medical and dental homes is a priority for ABCD Head Start. On site dental prevention service is provided for all Head Start children. Children also receive hearing, vision and nutrition screenings with appropriate referrals and resources offered to families when needed.
- Meal time is an extension of learning by modeling language, conversation, social interaction and introducing new foods. The menu integrates the latest nutritional research so families are offered the healthiest meals possible. ABCD Head Start works with all families to ensure that their cultural needs are valued and special diets are accommodated for.
- A mental health professional is available to every Head Start program to provide mental health services for children and families. Ongoing training and support ensures that ABCD Head Start provides high quality classroom environments that foster success, safety and wellness for each child. Opportunities are available for parents to become partners in their child's education program.

## Application Process

### Application

The parent(s) must complete an application at the local Head Start/Early Head Start program with an ERSEA (Enrollment) Specialist. They will be asked to provide documentation in order to verify eligibility. Required documentation will include documents to verify child's age (Birth certificate, passport, hospital record or baptismal certificate), Proof of residency (Utility bill, rental agreement, rent receipt, statement from shelter, credit card statement, bank statement) and proof of family's income (Income tax forms, pay stubs, TANF letter, SSI letter, Worker's Compensation statement, alimony or child support agreements).

### Child's Records

In order to ensure that appropriate enrollment and placement decisions are made, the referring agency should send all relevant information about the child and family to the ABCD Intervention Support Specialist prior to, or during the application process.

### Support Services

The referring agency and the Intervention Support Specialist will collaborate to ensure that all needed support services are coordinated with the Head Start/Early Head Start program.

### Other Services

As appropriate, the Intervention Support Specialist (Disabilities/Mental Health Coordinator) will arrange for the referring agency and/or parent to visit the Head Start/Early Head Start center. Additionally, they may arrange to visit the child in his/her present program, and/or attend BPS Eligibility Meetings/IFSP Meetings.

## Enrollment Process

The Intervention Support Specialist will serve as an advocate for the child throughout the enrollment process. They will share all relevant information about the child's needs with other staff involved in the intake process. ABCD Head Start & Children's Services will notify the parent if the child has been accepted, put on a waiting list, or if the program cannot meet the child's needs.

If a child is accepted the Intervention Support Specialist and other ABCD staff will continue to support the family in gathering all required documentation, including but not limited to obtaining copies of the child's IEP/IFSP and medical documentation necessary for medical clearance.

## Transition Process

If the child is accepted, the Intervention Support Specialist and/or other ABCD program staff will communicate with the referring agency to plan the transition process.



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***For more information, contact:***

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**Head Start & Children's Services is a program of  
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