The Parent Committee Handbook
for Head Start &
Early Head Start Parents

An Introduction to Decision Making

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An Open Letter to Parents

You made a wise choice to apply for Head Start/Early Head Start, and now that your child is enrolled there is a whole new world open to you, too! Research suggests that children do better in school when their parents are involved. In addition, parents personally benefit from involvement as well. Did you know that you are automatically a member of the Parent Committee? This membership carries many privileges. You can:

- Advise staff in the development and implementation of local program policies, activities, and services;
- Plan, conduct, and participate in informal as well as formal programs and activities for parents and staff; and
- Participate in the recruitment and screening of Head Start employees within established guidelines.

You are valued and needed, you have an important voice, and your involvement makes a difference for your child.

This handbook was designed for you to become more familiar with the Parent Committee so you can get off to a great start. This involvement will be rewarding, challenging and important to your child, your community, and YOU!
The Parent Committee Tip Sheet

The Parent Committee is required by the Federal government for all Head Start/Early Head Start Programs. All parents are automatically members of the Parent Committee. Parents are chosen to serve on the agency Policy Council from the Parent Committee(s). Parents from Head Start, Early Head Start, home-based, center-based, family day care, full day, part day, and other delivery models should participate in the Parent Committee.

The Parent Committee should be organized and run by parents. It is a chance for you to have input into your child’s education, all the more important since you are your child’s first and most important teacher. In the beginning, you and the other parents might need staff to help get the Parent Committee organized, but after that it’s up to you! It is also a chance for you to network and meet with other parents to discuss anything that is of interest to you. The Head Start/Early Head Start staff may also share information with you, but this is your chance to take ownership and lead. Consider this experience as leadership practice for things you will do in the future.

Getting Started:

Sometimes getting started can be difficult, so consider the items on checklist below:

✓ What time will we meet (a.m./p.m.)?
✓ How often will we meet (bi-weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, etc.)?
✓ Do we have by-laws? (Review the sample by-laws in this handbook)
✓ What officers do we need? When is the election?
✓ Where will we meet? (center, community room, etc.)
✓ How will we advertise and promote the Parent Committee?

Once you get started, stay on a roll; keep it going so parents won’t lose interest. Make assignments fairly so that one person doesn’t have to do all of the work. Involve mothers, fathers, guardians, and grandparents, too. And don’t forget to have FUN!
Sample Parent Committee By-laws

By-Laws of The

__________________________________________________________

Parent Committee

Article I - Name

The name of this organization shall be the ________________________________

____________ Parent Committee.

Article II - Purposes and Functions

Section 1: Purposes

The purpose of this committee shall be to provide every parent of an enrolled child with
opportunities to assist in the development of activities that address their interests and
needs and that support the education and healthy development of their children.

Section 2: Functions

The Parent Committee must carry out at least the following minimum responsibilities:

1. Advise staff in developing and implementing local program policies, activities, and
   services.
2. Plan, conduct, and participate in informal as well as formal programs and activities
   for parents and staff.
3. Within the guidelines established by the governing body, Policy Council or Policy
   Committee, participate in the recruitment and screening of Early Head Start and
   Head Start employees.

Article III - Membership

Section 1: Categories

a. Each center of the ________________________________ Head Start/Early Head Start Program
   shall have one Parent Committee, from which they will elect ____ parent member(s) to serve
   on the Policy Council (see Policy Council By-Laws).

b. All parents of enrolled children are automatically members of the ____________
Suggested Officers for the Parent Committee

Chairperson

- Organizes and leads the Parent Committee
- Calls the meeting to order and chairs the meetings
- Works with other parents and appropriate staff in the center (or home-based option)
- Learns about center-based / home-based policies and practices
- Encourages and motivates parents to get involved
- Gets involved in community events that impact Head Start/Early Head Start
- Keeps a positive attitude about the center (or home-based)

Vice-Chairperson

- Substitutes for the Chairperson in his/her absence
- Assists the chairperson as needed
- Becomes the chair in the event of resignation, etc.

Secretary

- Takes minutes of meetings, reads minutes from last meetings
- Helps the chairperson organize the agenda and sign-in sheets
- Posts Parent Committee minutes and or sends minutes home to parents
- Reminds parents about meetings and/or activities by mail, letters, postcards, e-mails, phone, etc.
- Assists with meeting logistics, room set up, etc.

Treasurer (Optional)

- Keeps a record of the Parent Activity Fund usage, policy and procedure
- Submits reports to Parent Committee as appropriate