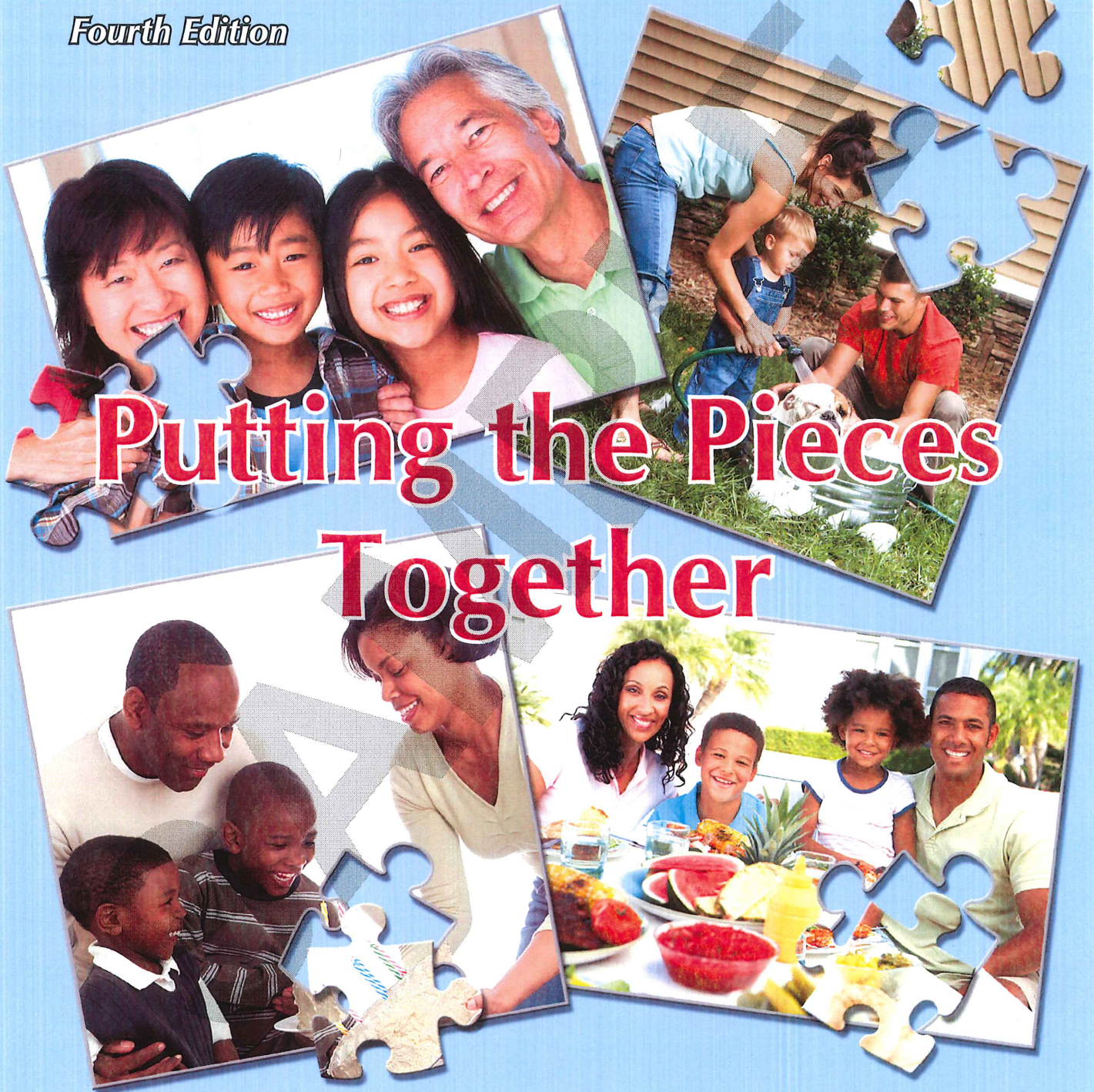


Family Partnership Agreements Workbook for Head Start & Early Head Start

Fourth Edition



Putting the Pieces Together

*A Publication of
Training & Technical Assistance Services
Western Kentucky University*

Family Partnership Agreements Workbook for Head Start & Early Head Start Programs

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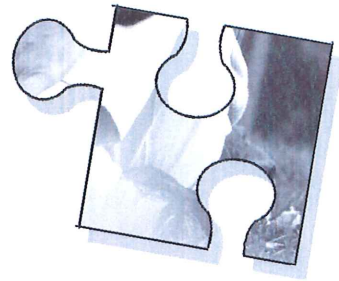
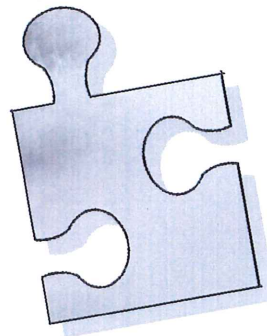
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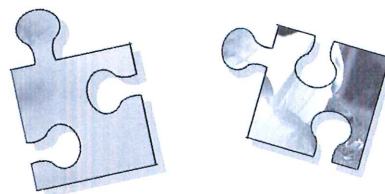
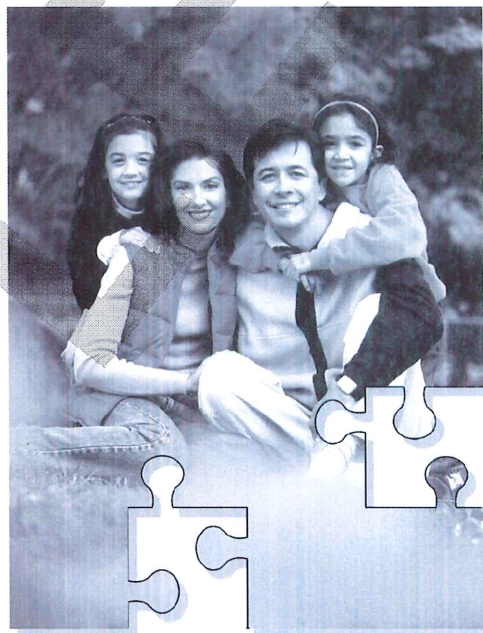
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Preface

The Family Partnership Agreement process can be life-changing, eye-opening, exciting, challenging and fun for families and staff. **Putting the Pieces Together: The Family Partnership Agreements Workbook for Head Start and Early Head Start** and the training for which it was compiled are designed to assist Head Start and Early Head Start staff in their efforts to effectively partner with families.

Though not recommended as a self-study guide, **Putting the Pieces Together** is an excellent tool for use at family service staff training and pre-service events led by experienced Family Service Managers. The workbook is filled with open-ended exercises that emphasize the process of working with families. The Family Partnership Agreement process is the open-ended, interactive, on-going, and evolving “journey” that staff take with families.

Each section of the workbook was designed so that it can be used separately or together with other sections. The workbook can be useful in training staff whether they are new or seasoned at working with Head Start and Early Head Start families. While the workbook was initially designed for family service staff and their superiors, it can be also used with parents, teachers, service area managers, and Policy Council and Governing body members as a tool to understanding the comprehensive work done in Head Start and Early Head Start.



Introduction

Many people see Head Start as an educational experience for children. Although Head Start is proud of its education services, Head Start's services are much more comprehensive. Head Start program services include health, education, parent involvement and education, family services and supports and community partnerships. Such all-inclusive services are designed to meet the needs of children in the context of the family. With these services, Head Start maximizes its ability to influence the development of each child and family.

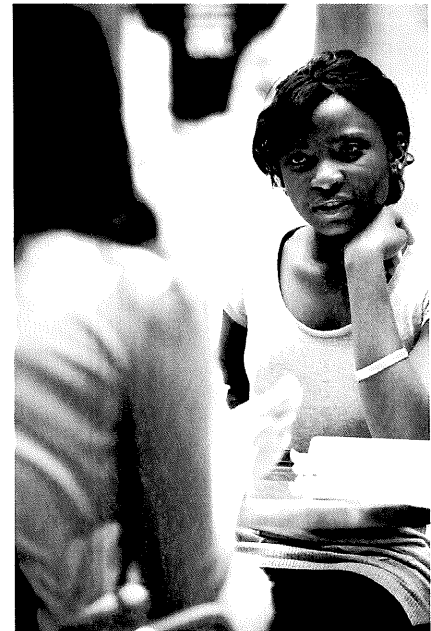
Traditional parent involvement programs see parents as outside the core of the program. In contrast, Head Start invites families to be key players, and in fact, expects them to be key players. Parents and family members are welcomed, not only as participants, but also as decision makers. Unlike programs that respond to parents as a group, Head Start provides individualized attention to meet the needs of each family. Head Start believes that decisions that guide its practice, have greater legitimacy when they are made in collaboration with those we serve; a parents' perspective is critical to understanding appropriate strategies for supporting children's development. A strong and healthy family is a child's most powerful resource.

One of the activities Head Start and Early Head Start staff must offer parents is the opportunity to develop individualized family partnership agreements. The family partnership agreement is a strengths-based, family-driven, relationship-centered process designed to provide support to families in direct response to their interests, goals, strengths and needs.

The family partnership agreement process recognizes that there are many ways and approaches to working with families. Head Start staff initiate this process and provide partnership opportunities for families by asking, "How can Head Start support you?"

The family partnership agreement process provides opportunities for families to identify and set goals, and to design an individualized approach for achieving their goals. Staff assist families in defining goals in measurable terms, discussing what needs to be done to achieve these goals, and how the accomplishment of each goal will be determined.

The emphasis here is on the process of relationship building and not on the agency's system of keeping family records. Because the family partnership agreement process is family driven, plans will vary among families. These agreements are not necessarily formal documents, step-by-step activities, or even interactions that must occur with all Head Start families.



The family partnership agreement is not a one-time event – it is a process. There are several elements that contribute to successfully engaging families and implementing the family partnership agreement process. They include but are not limited to Building Partnerships with Families; Conversations with Families; Family Assessment; and Case Management.

Partnerships with Families

The term *family partnership* characterizes the on-going relationship between staff and each family in Head Start. Building a family partnership is an interactive process that starts when a parent says, “I want to enroll my child,” and continues until the family has made a successful transition out of the Head Start program.

Family partnerships are trusting, respectful, and supportive relationships. Head Start staff foster these unique relationships by reaching out to families and showing them that they are valued and important. However, just as families grow and develop over time, so must each family partnership. It must change depending on the desires and needs of the family.

It takes time to build a trusting relationship, one where the family feels comfortable confiding in and sharing their wants and needs with staff. Head Start staff should extend invitations to the family to join them in partnership, but at the same time, be prepared to wait patiently for the family to accept. As trust is established, the family will begin to recognize the staff person as a resource, advocate, and partner. No matter where families fall in their readiness, it is important for staff to never lose sight of each family’s right to decide when and to what extent they want Head Start involved in their lives.

Conversations with Families

A conversation is an oral exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, or ideas. When working with families, conversations can serve to put the family at ease. Interviews typically do not. Respectful conversations between staff and families – from recruitment, to enrollment, and throughout their time in the program – build trust and show respect for the family. Staff should have on-going, two-way conversations with families, always stressing their strengths and successes. Through formal and informal conversations, staff will gain information about what the family really wants.

Family Assessment

Family assessment is a process for collecting and managing information. The intent of family assessment is to obtain a full understanding and unbiased view of the family... not just its challenges, but also its strengths, values, and goals. Since these are dynamic family elements, the assessment is a continuing process of discovery for both staff and family.

A good family assessment is also about relationship building. This relationship helps to build mutual trust and respect between staff and families and often leads to more successful outcomes for the children and families. On-going family assessment helps to identify the many