



DOÑA ANA COUNTY HEAD START FAMILY HANDBOOK



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Welcome to The Family!

We are honored to be a part of your family experiences as you and your child join the early learning programs of Doña Ana County Head Start/NMSU. We know that our time together can be a rewarding experience for you and your family, and we are committed to working closely with you to make that happen.

This Family Handbook is designed to provide you with information about our services and the important role you play in your child's life and in the success of our program. You are your child's first and most important educator, and you have the primary responsibility for your child's development.

Working together as a team, we will provide support you and your child can use to succeed in school and in life.

Please read this handbook to become familiar with our program. Further information about our program and policies can be found at:

<https://headstart.nmsu.edu/>

On the Parent Board in your child's classroom and

In the Teacher/TA Resource Binder

Let us know if you have any questions about this handbook or the program. We are open to comments, suggestions and concerns.

Sincerely,

Brianda Tzintzun
Program Manager



OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Doña Ana County Head Start/ Early Head Start/NMSU will empower children, their families, and the community by building and providing a safe, healthy, and high-quality education in an inclusive, cultural, and diverse setting.

In our work together, Doña Ana County Head Start/NMSU embraces a shared commitment to these values:

- **STRONG, POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS:**
Connecting children, families, communities, and each other, honored through open-honest communication, and taking time to understand and build mutual regard.
- **OPEN, ENGAGING COLLABORATION:**
Cooperation, open-minded give and take, shared decision making, engaging diverse talents and resources with a focus on common goals and passions.
- **POSITIVE CHILD DEVELOPMENT:**
Promoting social emotional well-being and developing positive peer relationships.
- **RESPECT AND ACCEPTANCE FOR ALL:**
Recognizing, valuing, encouraging, and supporting community and individual differences and perspectives.
- **HIGH STANDARDS OF QUALITY:**
Best practice at the core of decisions, professional development and personal growth, high expectations, personal responsibility.



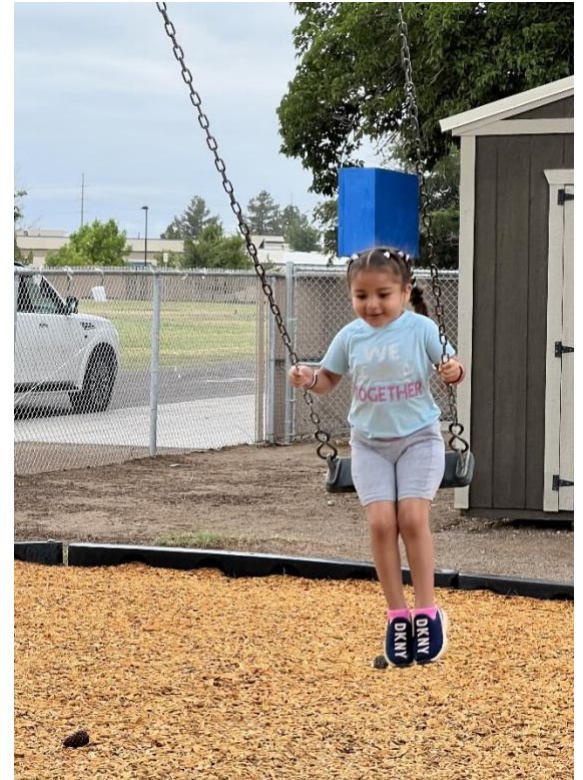
ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Doña Ana County Head Start/NMSU is a comprehensive program that serves pregnant women, children birth to 5 years old, and their families. We have three program models, Early Head Start center-based, Early Head Start home-based and Preschool Head Start.

Early Head Start home-based is a Prenatal to 3-year-old program focusing on relationship development between parent and child. Services are offered through home visits, classroom experiences at the Anthony Center and parent child play groups.

Early Head Start Center-Based in Anthony provides early learning, care and enrichment experiences to children in an early care and education setting.

Preschool is a 3 to 5-year-old, center-based program providing learning opportunities leading to higher levels of school readiness. Preschool is offered at Centers located in Anthony, Berino, Vado and five centers in the Las Cruces area.



For more information regarding locations and program option, please visit us at <https://headstart.nmsu.edu> or call our Administrative office at (575)646-8910 or visit us at:

1335 International Mall Drive Rm. #332
Las Cruces, NM 88003-8001



ENROLLMENT INFORMATION

PROGRAM ENROLLMENT

Doña Ana County Head Start/NMSU are dedicated to providing equal learning environment. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, or age. Acceptance into the program is based on age and income eligibility, set by the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Each family must meet the federal requirements for eligibility. This system ensures that children and families with the greatest need benefit from our comprehensive services.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/frequently-asked-questions-about-head-start>



Our program strives to provide quality services to all enrolled children and families, including full inclusion of people with special needs. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA P L 101-336), Doña Ana County Head Start policies and procedures are intended to eliminate barriers to program services or facilities. If your child has special needs in order to fully participate, please notify our office (575)646-8910, your Family Outreach Worker or your child's teacher.

PROGRAM POLICIES

Confidentiality:

Doña Ana County Head Start is committed to ensure the security and confidentiality of families, children, and staff. Confidentiality requirements include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Physical and electronic records/files are secured
- Only authorized staff members may access child and family files
- Staff members share children's information on a need-to-know basis
- Your written consent is needed prior to any release of individual child or family records.
- Staff and volunteers are trained prior to their start date either through orientation or one-on-one training on how to maintain confidentiality. They review and sign the confidentiality agreement and code of conduct.

The Code of Conduct expectations include, but are not limited to, the following:

Doña Ana County Head Start will ensure all staff, consultants, contractors, and volunteers abide by the program's standards of conduct that:

- Ensure staff, consultants, contractors, and volunteers implement positive strategies to support children's well-being and prevent and address challenging behavior;
- Ensure staff, consultants, contractors, and volunteers do not maltreat or endanger the health or safety of children, including, at a minimum, **that staff must not:**
- Use corporal punishment;
- Use isolation to discipline a child;
- Bind or tie a child to restrict movement or tape a child's mouth;
- Use or withhold food as a punishment or reward;
- Use toilet learning/training methods that punish, demean, or humiliate a child;
- Use any form of emotional abuse, including public or private humiliation, rejecting, terrorizing, extended ignoring, or corrupting a child;
- Physically abuse a child;
- Use any form of verbal abuse, including profane, sarcastic language, threats, or derogatory remarks about the child or child's family; or,
- Use physical activity or outdoor time as a punishment or reward;
- Ensure staff, consultants, contractors, and volunteers respect and promote the unique identity of each child and family and do not stereotype on any basis, including gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or family composition;

Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting:

All Doña Ana County Head Start staff, contractors, and volunteers are required by law to call the New Mexico Children, Youth & Families Department – Child Protective Services (CPS) if they have any reason to suspect a child may have been the victim of abuse or neglect whether it occurs inside or outside of the school. Staff will follow state regulations regarding the time frames of the information that must be reported, and confidentiality of reported information. If a report is made, the child and family will continue receiving Head Start services. A report to CPS or a family's involvement with CPS or law enforcement will never affect the participation of the child in the program.



Photo Policy

Doña Ana County Head Start is very conscious of the safety and privacy of your child and family. In order to ensure that pictures of your child do not reach social media or unauthorized individuals, photographs may only be taken during class time using the classroom camera, cellphone and IPAD provided. No photographs may be taken on private cell phones, cameras, or other devices. (Field trips are considered an extension of classroom time.) This will ensure that only paid staff have access to photographs taken and are able to share them appropriately with parents and guardians.

If you are concerned that you will miss a special moment in your child's life, remember that staff can also provide you, at the end of the year, with copies of any pictures taken of your child throughout the year. Thank you for helping us keep the children in our program safe.

Attendance

Your child's attendance is an important part of their educational experience and success. Regular attendance helps create a consistent, safe, healthy, and trusting environment for your child and the other children in the class.

If your child is going to be absent for any reason, contact the center and let them know the reason for the absence. If your child is absent and we do not hear from you, your child's teacher or Family Outreach Worker will attempt to contact you to find out the reason for the absence and when your child will be coming back.

If your child has a pattern of irregular attendance, your Family Outreach Worker will contact you to discuss the challenges and offer support. If the absenteeism continues your child may be dropped from the program. Communication between you and your child's classroom is very important!



Drop-Off & Pick-Up

To ensure the safety of children at all times, it is important that you are aware of specific center drop-off and pick-up procedures.

You and/or other designated adults that transport children are required to sign your child in at drop-off and out at pick-up. Full day classes are from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Half Day morning classes are from 8:00 am to 11:30 am. Half Day afternoon classes are from 12:30 pm to 4:00 pm.

For your child's safety never leave them alone in the classroom or on the playground. Be sure a staff member has acknowledged you and/or your child, before leaving.

Your child will only be released to you, or other people designated by you on the Enrollment Emergency Contact Form. If it is necessary for your child to be picked up by someone other than those designated, you must call the center to make staff aware of the person picking up your child, and to give permission. A photo ID will be required by anyone that is unfamiliar to staff. It is important for you to know that if a parent's name is on the child's birth certificate,

but is not on the emergency contact list, he/she has legal access to their child. If a parent in this situation picks up their child at the center, staff will check the ID for authenticity, release the child to the parent, and then contact you.

If you or another person designated to pick up a child appears to be incapacitated when they arrive, staff will ask the person to call someone else who is authorized to pick up your child for the safety of the child. If the person leaves with the child and staff have concerns about the safety of the child, they will call the police and inform them of the situation.

If the event that a child is not picked up within 60 minutes of the end of their class, and all attempts to contact the parent/guardian or other emergency contacts have been unsuccessful, the program manager will take steps to ensure the safety of the child. This may include contacting Child Protective Services and/or local law enforcement. Staff will remain with the child until the situation has been resolved.

NUTRITION & HEALTH INFORMATION

Nutrition & Meal Service

All children are provided with a nourishing breakfast, lunch and snack, or lunch and a snack, depending on the time of their class. Staff and children eat together in a family style meal setting where food is passed around the table and children are supported in serving themselves. Children are encouraged, but not forced, to eat or taste food served during meal and snack time. We view mealtimes as an important opportunity to engage in conversation and social interaction. Food is never used as punishment or reward.

Special dietary needs, with documentation from the child's health care provider, are considered when providing meals to children. Staff will work with you to identify nutritional needs for your child and when appropriate, a Health/Nutrition Specialist is available to provide nutrition consultation. It is important that you notify staff of any food allergies, cultural preferences, nutrition related health problems, and/or any feeding requirements.



Head Start follows USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program and foods served are high in nutrients, low in fat, sugar, and salt. Health department regulations allow us to only use store bought food and we must be very careful of allergies and other health related concern.

Health & Safety

Healthy habits are established in the classroom to help reduce the spread of germs and illness. Hand washing, tooth brushing, and health checks are practiced daily in the classroom. Indoor and outdoor spaces are inspected and cleaned daily and kept free of hazardous materials and conditions. We ensure that the playgrounds are age appropriate, and that equipment and safety is held to a high standard.

Doña Ana County Head Start staff strictly follow the rules of the health and safety policies. If you have any questions or concerns regarding our health and safety practices, please speak with the program manager to review Doña Ana County Head Start policies and procedures.

Wellness Support

Supporting children's and families' positive mental health is an important part of our program. In early childhood, children learn to build attachments and relationships with others, explore and try new things on their own, and understand and manage emotions. As your child's most important role model, children learn these lifelong skills from you. Talk to your Family Outreach Worker for more information and resources available.

Well-Child Care

Head Start guidelines require that programs track all health services provided to each child. Doña Ana County Head Start must ensure that any health-related issues that are identified during health check-ups and well-child visits receive appropriate referral and follow-up. Additional documentation from your health care provider may be required.

If your child needs help with diapering or potty training, please talk to the classroom teacher so that we can provide the assistance your child needs. Our full-day classes have established routines to offer children a nap. Staff will follow rules appropriate to each child's age.

Family Outreach Workers will work with you to ensure that the following documents and information are completed and up to date:

- Current health insurance and medical home
- Health Information form
- Well child exam appropriate for the child's age
- Current immunization record
- Dental exam and/or dental referral of follow-up treatment (cleaning, filling, sealants, etc.)
- All children receive a developmental and social emotional screening within 45 days of entry into the program. These are conducted by staff with your input. All screening results will be shared with you.
- Lead screenings appropriate for the child's age.

- Health conditions that require medication will require documentation from your child's health care provider.
- Special diets will require documentation from your health care provider.

Dental Care

Regular dental care prevents tooth decay and disease, and improves chewing, nutrient retention, language skills, and overall health.

Head Start standards require all children to establish and maintain a dental home where they receive on-going, routine preventive care and restorative treatment, if needed. Your Family Outreach Worker can support you in identifying a dental home for your child. Staff will be working with you to ensure your child has received the timely and appropriate dental care specified by standards.



EDUCATION INFORMATION

Philosophy

The first five years of life are a time of wondrous development and learning. Children grow from infants communicating through babbling and crawling on all fours-to toddlers speaking short sentences and beginning to run – to preschoolers telling detailed stories and kicking a ball to a friend. All young children learn in the context of caring, responsive, and stimulating relationships as they explore the world around them. Children have diverse strengths that are rooted in their family's culture, background, language, and beliefs and to this end we believe you are the first and most important caregiver, teacher, and advocate for your child. Below you will find a brief description of the different ways our program works with you to provide services and learning opportunities to support your child's developmental growth and educational success. School readiness goals have been adopted and drive our curriculum and planning. You are always welcome and encouraged to stay and play during any classroom or center activity.

Program Models

Early Head Start (EHS): Prenatal-Age 3

Experiences in the first three years of life have a strong impact on brain development and learning. They are the foundation for healthy development and strong child outcomes in the preschool years and beyond.

Home-Based

Families receive weekly, 1 ½ hour, home visits with your assigned EHS Home Visitor. These visits provide an opportunity to gain support and encouragement. Topics for discussion may include nutrition, health, behavior, developmental milestones and how you can support your

child to build confidence as they grow. Parent-child play groups are scheduled twice monthly. This group setting provides opportunities for your child to play with other children, work on goals you have for them, and allows you to meet other parent for additional support. The expectations of the program are that you attend your visits and the play groups.



Toddler Classroom

Children receive an 8-hour classroom experience, 4 days a week. A variety of appropriate activities will be provided to help your child explore singing, dancing, reading, painting, and building. your child's developmental progress, and other needs as they arise. Your EHS teacher will provide 2 home visits and 2 conferences throughout the year to discuss will discuss a home visit schedule with you on your first visit.

Preschool Head Start Ages 3-5



From 3 to 5 years of age, experiences continue to have a strong impact on brain development and learning. Children build on their earlier experiences to learn even more complex ways of communicating, relating, exploring, social/emotional well-being and understanding the world around them. Areas of learning during this age period become more specific and differentiated.

Preschool Classroom

Preschool children receive an 8-hour classroom experience, 4 days a week. Your child's learning is supported by literacy-rich environments to build foundations for strong reading and writing, positive interactions between adults and children to help build social skills, activities to develop math, science, and problem-solving skills, music, movement, art, and opportunities to learn about self, family and community.

Teachers will conduct four educational visits with your family. Two of these will be home visits and two will be school conferences. The purpose of these visits is to discuss your child's development and progress. You will be contacted to schedule a time for the visits. You may also schedule an appointment with the teacher at any time to address questions or concerns

about your child. The preschool class is held Monday through Thursday. Make-up days will be conducted on Fridays.

Curriculum: Doña Ana County uses The Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers and for Preschool. These researched based, state-adopted early childhood curriculums provide a foundation and guide teachers in planning instruction. Other curriculum materials are also used by teachers and home visitors to enhance learning experiences. School readiness is a primary focus in all our DACHS models. The curriculum and the program's school readiness goals align with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. Ongoing developmental assessments are conducted throughout the program year. Information from these



assessments, classroom observations, children's work samples and the information you share with us is gathered and used to plan appropriate activities to support early learning. You are always welcome to observe and participate in your child's learning experiences in the classroom. Early interventions and/or special education support are available in our classrooms. A current Individual Educational Plan (IEP) or Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) must be on file. Your child's teacher can answer any other questions you may have.

Celebrations

In the classroom we introduce children to diverse, cultural and seasonal celebrations through educational experiences that are developmentally appropriate. In order to design activities that reflect the traditions of all the children and families we serve; we encourage you to share your cultural traditions with your child's class. For the respect and safety of all children, please talk to your child's teacher before planning any celebration for the classroom.

Clothing

Active learning is messy. Successful learning happens when a child is dressed appropriately in:

- Comfortable play clothes that he/she can get dirty and change easily
- Tennis shoes, or shoes that stay on while climbing, jumping, riding and running. No sandals.
- A sweater or sweatshirt when it is chilly.
- A warm jacket with a hood or a hat, as it gets colder (we go outside, even if it is cold)

It is required to provide a change of clothes for your child. Be sure to mark coats, backpacks, and other belongings with your child's name.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT INFORMATION

Respecting Values and Traditions

Doña Ana County Head Start honors and respects all children and families enrolled in our program. We are fortunate to have families from many different places, cultures, and belief systems. To honor the diversity and experiences of our children and families, we invite you to share important events and traditions with us.

Parent Volunteers

Head Start is family oriented and you are encouraged to volunteer at your child's center. Volunteering provides you with the opportunity to develop existing skills and gain new ones. Volunteering is a great way to support a strong foundation for your child's education and lifelong learning.

Parent Training & Family Activities

Workshops, trainings, and family activities are offered throughout the year at your child's center and other locations and are based on the interests and needs of parents. Parents and Family Outreach Workers work together to develop a plan for parent training and activities monthly.

Male Involvement

Our program values the unique and important role that fathers play in their child's life. Fathers and other male family members are also encouraged to volunteer in the classroom or to share a special skill or passion. Research shows that responsible fatherhood significantly impacts a child's esteem, social/emotional development, behavior, success in school, and quality of relationships. Fathers & male role models are encouraged to participate in all our parent/child activities.



PARENT LEADERSHIP

Center Parent Meeting

Parents have an important role in the operation of the Head Start program. The parent committee is a group of parents who represent the center where the child attends. Center Parent meetings are generally held monthly. During Center Parent meetings you are encouraged to participate in planning activities, trainings, and family events. Head Start staff, including the Family Outreach Workers and teachers, attend the meetings to advise and inform parents of center activities. Parents are also updated on Policy Council activities and Head Start requirements and regulations. All Head Start families are invited and encouraged to attend. The Center Parent Meeting is a great way to be actively involved at your child's center, network with other parents, and have fun.

Policy Council

The Doña Ana County Head Start Program Policy Council is a governing body that includes Head Start parents and community members. The Policy Council is responsible for program decisions including recruitment and selection policies, personnel approval, program funding and budget. Representatives are elected by Head Start parents. It is the responsibility of elected Policy Council members to be informed and keep parents informed regarding issues facing the Head Start program, regularly attend meetings, attend trainings, and advocate for the best interest of the entire program. The Policy Council meets once a month, and Policy Council meetings are open to anyone who would like to attend.



FAMILY & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Support and Referrals

Raising a family with young children has its challenges, and Doña County Head Start wants to help families grow and find the support and resources they need. Staff work with you to build caring and respectful partnerships based on strengths and abilities, so your child has the best chance for success in school and life.

Here are some examples of referrals staff can provide:

- Housing assistance
- Utility assistance
- Alcohol or substance abuse services
- Domestic violence services
- Food and clothing assistance

Family Goal Setting

When you think about what you would like to achieve for your child and family in one year, two years, or even five years, you are thinking about family goals. Family Outreach Workers can help you set goals and work towards making those goals happen. Family Outreach Workers can help you identify strengths and challenges, set goals for the future, and make plans to meet those goals. Goals may include reading with your children every day, finding better housing, learning computer skills, creating a household spending plan, or cooking more nutritious meals at home. Family Outreach Workers supports you in making plans to meet your goals and will check in with you throughout the year as you make progress toward completing your goals.



SAFETY INFORMATION

School Closure

If schools in your school district are closed because of bad weather, unsafe roads, or other emergency situations, Doña Ana County Head Start will follow the guidelines set out by your individual school district.

School closure information can be accessed by Radio, Internet, or School District. Local TV stations will list closures.

Las Cruces Public Schools: Emergency information will be posted on the LCPS website: <http://www.lcps.net> and you can call LCPS Information Hotline (575-647-LCPS, 575-647-5277).

Gadsden Independent School District: <http://www.gisd.k12.nm.us>

Pedestrian Safety

- Always park in designated parking area and escort children to and from the center
- Remind children to hold your hand
- When walking to school, use sidewalks when possible and walk facing traffic
- Wear bright or reflective clothing especially during times of low visibility
- Always stop at the curb before crossing the street. Use crosswalks
- Teach children to look left-right-left
- Make eye contact with the drivers when walking in front of them
- Walk, do not run, across the street
- Reinforce the meaning of the red, yellow and green colors indicated on the traffic light
- Always be alert and cautious looking for rushed or distracted motorists

Emergency Plan

In the event of an emergency, staff will implement the natural disaster and emergency plan. It is important that you, as the parent/guardian, provide the correct contact information for your child. Also, communicate any changes in contact information to our program staff. In each classroom you can find the preparedness plan for emergencies and natural disasters. The plan lists each person's responsibility during an emergency evacuation, facility exit locations, emergency phone numbers and temporary relocation sites. Your classroom teacher will review this plan with you.

Children and classroom staff drill every month for fire and shelter in place. They also drill every three months for evacuation for natural disasters.

In the event of any of the following situations take the following steps:

WHAT TO DO:

- Trust us: the center has a plan in case of any emergency and we will do what is necessary until you are reunited with your child.
- Stay where you are: You must stay safe so staff can reunite you with your child. All parents must pick up their child at a designated location this may be outside of the center.
- Keep your phone line free. Don't use the phone except to get medical help if you need it. We will contact you as soon as possible.

WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Panic – We know it can take a couple of anxious hours before you're sure your child is okay, but panicking can lead to unnecessary mistakes.
- Try not to get to the center to pick up your child. You will be in no more danger on the street than your child in the center. There may be obstacles and you may not be able to reach the center. Wait until someone from the center speaks with you before trying to contact the center.
- Call the center – telephone lines must be kept free. Your child's center will contact you as soon as possible when the location is safe to pick up your child. Staff time should be spent comforting children and ensuring their safety.
- Sending a stranger or unauthorized person to pick up your child. When we are given the signal that everything is safe, it is important to remember that we can only release children to those who have been identified in the consent form signed by you.

Families receiving in-home services should follow their home natural disaster plan. See your teacher for more information.

FAMILY PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

I understand as an enrolled parent in the program I will:

Respect:

- Treat program staff, other parents, and children in the program with kindness and respect.
- Honor the professional boundaries set by my family outreach worker and teacher.

Confidentiality:

- Keep confidential what is shared by other parents in the program, or information about children while in the classroom.

Attendance:

- Make sure that my child attends school every day on time unless he/she is ill, or we have a family emergency. Call and inform the center staff when my child is going to be absent.
- For Early Head Start parents: establish a regular schedule with my home visitor/teacher. Call my home visitor/teacher to reschedule my visit if my child is ill or I have a family emergency. For Early Head Start Home Based parents, attend parent/child socialization groups twice monthly.

Medical/Dental:

- Ensure my child has a regular doctor and dentist, if needed, I will work with staff to find one.
- Make sure that my child's immunizations, well-child, and dental examinations stay current.
- Follow up on any medical, dental, or other health concerns regarding my child.

I understand that program staff will:

Respect:

- Treat my family with kindness and respect.
- Advise my family of the professional boundary guidelines staff need to follow.

Confidentiality:

- Keep confidential within the agency all information I share (verbally and in writing) unless I give written consent to share information with other agencies.

Medical/Dental:

- Provide resources and information to help my family locate a medical and dental home.
- Work with me to ensure that my child's immunizations and well child visits/dental examinations are up to date.
- Follow up on medical, dental, or other health concerns regarding my child in a timely manner.
- Provide me with information related to healthy habits, screenings, and other health related topics.

Support:

- Provide me with a Family Handbook with pertinent program information. (My signature below indicates I have received the handbook and program orientation.)
- Assist me on progress towards achieving my goals and provide referrals and support when I request social services and community resources.

Home Visits/Conferences:

- Provide me with information about my child's education.
- Arrive at my home on time for home visits.
- Be prepared and on time for conferences.

Participation:

- Be home and ready to participate fully when program staff arrives for a home visit. Attend and be on time for school conferences.
- Participate in center activities, parent committee meetings and volunteer in the classroom, when able.
- Work in partnership with program staff to set child and family goals.

Overall Expectations:

- Talk with program staff if I am having difficulty with any of the expectations listed above.

- Call me if she/he is going to be late or needs to reschedule because of illness.

Mandated Reporter:

- Report any suspected incidents of child neglect or abuse as required by New Mexico Law.

Parent Signature

Teacher Signature

Family Outreach Worker signature

Date:

My Center's Contact Information

Center's Name: _____

Center Phone Number: _____

Teacher's Name: _____

Family Outreach Worker's Name: _____

Family Outreach Worker's Phone Number: _____



