

Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.



The Head Start Advantage

Success in Early Head Start

Key Takeaways

1. Early Head Start children perform better on a wide range of cognitive measures, have better social skills, and exhibit significantly fewer behavioral problems and incidents of aggression.
2. Families in Early Head Start have more positive parent-child relationships, more stable and healthy home environments, and less involvement with the child welfare system.

Measurable Impact

Health care

Early Head Start children have greater access to health care, are more likely to receive timely immunization and are less likely to be hospitalized for accident or injury.

Improved behavior

Early Head Start children are less aggressive and display significantly fewer behavioral problems.

Cognitive development

Early Head Start children have greater cognitive development and receptive language skills on standardized assessments.

Parental support

Early Head Start parents are more emotionally supportive, provide significantly more support for language and learning, and are less likely to engage in negative parenting behaviors.

The Head Start Advantage: Success in Early Head Start

Why are the early years a critical period of child development?

Children experience dramatic expansion and change in brain development in their first three years.

Safety, sufficient nutrients, nurturing care, and developmentally-appropriate stimulation set the foundation for a child's lifelong wellbeing and success.

Poverty and economic inequality can negatively impact a child's development in many ways, including by threatening the well-being of their caregivers. Maternal depression affects child development both in utero and in the early years. Moreover, access to financial, social, and human capital enables or limits a family's investment of time, emotion, and material resources on a child's development.

Pregnancy and the early years of a child's life offer a unique opportunity to prevent a host of adverse maternal, child, and family outcomes that affect future life trajectories, such as reducing parental distress and children's early exposure to violence and neighborhood crime.

What does Early Head Start do to promote child and family well-being?

During the 2017-18 school year, Early Head Start (EHS) grantees across the country served more than 230,000 infants, toddlers, and pregnant women.

Through this multi-generational model, EHS families are recognized as their children's first teachers, and family advocates work with them to assess their own strengths and set goals.

EHS offers a wide range of services to help parents increase their knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to parenting, as well as enhance their own well-being, including prenatal and postpartum health care, housing and food security, parental education, employment, and more.



Early Head Start children have better sustained attention with objects and more positive approaches to learning.



Mothers in Early Head Start have lower rates of depression, and fathers are less likely to spank their children. Early Head Start fathers are also more involved in program-related child development activities.



Early Head Start improves parents' emotional responsiveness and reduces family conflict.



Early Head Start families have significantly lower rates of involvement with the child welfare system, and Early Head Start children have significantly fewer substantiated reports of physical and sexual abuse compared to a control group.

What is Head Start?

Head Start (HS) is a comprehensive early education program for children from at-risk backgrounds from birth to age 5. From early math and reading skills to confidence and resilience, Head Start helps children build the abilities they need to be successful in school and life. Head Start recognizes the role of parents as their child's first and lifelong educators and engages parents as equal partners.