

HEAD START COMMUNITY PROGRAM OF MORRIS COUNTY, INC.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Objective

Confidentiality ensures a family's right to the protection of private, personal information shared with Head Start for the purpose of receiving services. Confidentiality is an ethical obligation of every Head Start staff member, as well as a program requirement. Head Start families must feel assured that their privacy will be respected by all employees of the agency. All staff, consultants, and volunteers must abide by the program's standards of conduct and follow program confidentiality policies.

Note – Head Start refers to both the Head Start and Early Head Start Programs.

Procedures

Location of Files

A child's permanent file will be located in the Social Services Office at the main center in Dover. At other sites a copy of the child's file is kept in the Family Advocate's office. The files are kept in locked file cabinets, with access to the key given only to those Head Start staff with a need to obtain the information.

Internal Confidentiality

1. Parents will be informed by staff that information shared by the family will remain confidential within the Head Start agency, but may be shared with other Program staff members on a need to know basis.
2. Staff will not discuss the children and families enrolled in Head Start with their personal friends or family.
3. Staff will not discuss the children and families enrolled in the program with volunteers or visitors that participate in the program. A staff member who needs to share information with other staff members (either formally or informally) will not do so in the presence of others.
4. The Policy Council and Board may at times need facts and data, but specific names, addresses, and other personal identifiers of children and families enrolled in the program will not be divulged.

External Confidentiality

1. Parents will be informed that before any information can be shared with another agency (including names, addresses, and phone numbers); the child's legal guardian must sign a Release of Information form. Only information specifically outlined in the release will be shared with the other agency, subject to the exceptions outlined in paragraph 3. Parents are to be informed of the amount of time the release will remain valid and are instructed that the release may be revoked by the parent before the expiration date by informing the program in writing.
2. Information may be sent to another agency via e-mail. It will not be faxed to another agency unless the designated agency has a secure fax machine or a person available to receive the fax as it is sent. A secure fax machine is one that is only accessible to agency staff. If the machine is accessible to the public (volunteers or visitors), it is not considered a secure fax machine. Staff will contact the designated agency by phone prior to sending information via fax to ensure a secure fax machine or that a person is available to receive the fax **and** will call the agency after fax transmittal to ensure the information was received. The word "Confidential" should be written on the fax cover sheet when faxing information regarding health, mental health or developmental information.
3. If an agency requests information from a participant's file, the child's legal guardian will be informed and a Release of Information form must be signed by the legal guardian before information will be shared with the requesting agency. Exceptions to this include:
 - A. Information required through a legal subpoena
 - B. Situations that pose an immediate danger for the family or community
 - C. Legal obligations, such as the reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect
 - D. Official representatives of governmental agencies requiring information for funding and services provided, including the Department of Health and Human Services
4. If information was released and/or faxed to an agency by mistake, Head Start staff will notify the legal guardian as soon as possible of the error.
5. Information in a participant's file that originated from another agency will not be released by the program, unless the information is to be released to a contracted Head Start partner.
6. When staff members are attending workshops, classes, etc. in the community, children's names may not be used during discussion or class presentations.

Head Start and Early Head Start Partners

Agencies and/or businesses who have written partnership agreements with Head Start are required to ensure confidentiality.

Confidential File Folders

In addition to Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect Forms and Contact Notes relevant to such reports, progress notes and information from Head Start Mental Health Consultants will be included in the Confidential File Folder. This folder is kept in a locked file cabinet.

Mental Health Consultant's Notes

Head Start's contracted partner recorded observations are kept in a confidential file folder. Mental health file folders are kept in the Mental Health Coordinator's office in a locked file cabinet.

Review of Files

1. Parents will be allowed to review information regarding their family and child from their child's file. Parents will not be allowed to review their child's Confidential File Folder.
2. In the case of legally separated or divorced parents, each parent's Family Partnership Agreement and Contact Notes will be considered inaccessible to the other parent.
3. Head Start staff will be available to parents to explain information in their child's file.
4. After review of information in their child's file, parents have the right to have those records corrected or amended, or if the parent and staff cannot agree, the parents' requests for change and explanations will be included as part of the permanent record.

Objective reporting and recording of information

1. To ensure that Head Start staff are entering objective and accurate information in a child's file, regularly scheduled reviews of the child's file are conducted by Service Area Coordinators and Managers.
2. Information recorded must be factual, objective and useful.

Transporting participant information or files

Files that must be transported in vehicles must be concealed from view at all times and all information must be kept secure to ensure no items are lost. When a file or participant information is transported, the information must be in a closed, non-transparent container.

Participant Information and agency computers

1. Staff who utilize agency computers to provide services for Head Start participants must ensure that the child/family information is protected. Computers are protected with a password. Only agency employees have access to the password.
2. E-mails that contain participant information must include an e-mail confidentiality statement as part of the correspondence.

Records of children who have transferred, dropped, or transitioned

Records of children who have transferred, dropped, or transitioned out of Head Start are stored at the central office in Dover. They are kept for seven years and then are shredded.

Use of video cameras

Parents may use video cameras to film special Head Start events. At these events parents are in attendance with their children and may choose to leave the area being filmed. Parents may not, however, videotape day-to-day classroom activities.

Training and Disciplinary Action

1. All new Head Start employees receive training on confidentiality policies and procedures.
2. If a parent, legal guardian or staff member believes that a breach of confidentiality has been committed by a Head Start staff member, they should contact the employee's supervisor.
3. Violation of a client's confidentiality will be taken seriously by the Head Start program. Once an incident has been brought to the attention of the employee's supervisor, it will be the supervisor's responsibility to address the violation and ensure the employee understands the repercussions of his/her actions. Consultation with the Executive Director may occur if needed.

It is crucial that these policies be followed by each employee and volunteer. Upon becoming involved in the program, each employee/volunteer must sign a confidentiality statement which will be placed in their file. Volunteer copies will be placed in each volunteer's file or kept by the Family and Community Partnerships Manager.

Failure to follow the Confidentiality Policy and guidelines will result in disciplinary action or termination.

HEAD START COMMUNITY PROGRAM OF MORRIS COUNTY, INC.

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY -- EMPLOYEES

As an employee of the Head Start Community Program of Morris County, I hereby agree to comply with the Program's Policy of Confidentiality. I have read the written copy of this Policy and understand the seriousness of its contents and the consequences should I breach the Policy.

Employee's Name

Employee's Signature

Employee's Position

Date

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY – POLICY COUNCIL

By the nature of the Head Start Program, you may become aware of confidential information about staff, children and their families. Head Start believes strongly in keeping personal information private. If you become aware of personal business and feel you must share the information, please relay this information to the Executive Director, the Community & Family Partnerships Manager, the Early Head Start Manager or the Education Manager ONLY. If the information is of the nature that it should be shared with other Policy Council members, it will be put on the Policy Council agenda. Do not repeat the information to anyone else. Do not attempt to counsel the person(s) involved.

I agree to comply with the Program’s Policy of Confidentiality. I have read the policy and understand the seriousness of its contents. I understand that no confidential information discussed at meeting should be discussed in public areas. I understand that if I share any confidential information, Head Start Community Program of Morris County, Inc., reserves the right to terminate my Policy Council membership.

Name

Signature

Date

HEAD START COMMUNITY PROGRAM OF MORRIS COUNTY, INC.

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY – VOLUNTEERS

While volunteering at Head Start, volunteers may learn confidential information about Head Start’s children and their families. It is Head Start policy that each individual’s privacy is respected and that personal information is regarded as highly confidential. This information should not be discussed with anyone, except as described below.

Volunteers should not attempt to counsel Early Head Start or Head Start children or their families. Should a volunteer learn something of a personal nature that he/she feels someone else should know, the volunteer should relay this information to the Executive Director, the Family & Community Partnerships Manager, the Early Head Start Manager or the Education Manager ONLY. If a volunteer learns of a case of child abuse, for example, one of the above listed individuals should be notified immediately and other procedures pertaining to child abuse should also be followed.

I agree to comply with the Program’s Policy of Confidentiality. I have read the policy and understand the seriousness of its contents.

Volunteer’s Name

Volunteer’s Signature

Date