



Family Handbook

A handbook for families in the Early Care and Education Programs provided by Kennebec Valley Community Action Program Child & Family Services and its partners

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome	2
Supporting School Readiness: Program Features	3
Family Engagement Opportunities	3
 Program Information:	
Attendance	5
Arrival/Departure Times	5
Child Guidance	5
Child Images	5
Clothing	6
Communication	6
Confidentiality	6
Continuity of Care/Primary Caregiving.....	6
Curriculum and Assessment	6
Diapering/Toileting	7
Emergencies.....	7
Fees	7
Health and Wellness	7
Home Visits	8
Illness	8
Inclusive Programming	8
“In-Kind”	8
Mandated Reporting	8
Meals and Nutrition	8
Medications – Prescription and “Over-the-Counter”	9
Minor Injuries	9
“Peaceable Workplace”	9
Physical Activity	9
Program Consultants	9
Program Options	9
Safety.....	9
Staff Expertise	10
Transportation	10
Volunteers	10
 Site Specific Information	 11



Welcome to the program ...

We believe that you and your child will have a wonderful experience!

KVCAP Child & Family Services (referred to as “C&FS” or “program”) works with school and community partners to provide high quality Early Care and Education services in Northern Kennebec and Somerset counties. C&FS offers Early Head Start and Head Start model services through center-based, home-based and family child care options. Our programs focus on relationships, experiences and environments that will support children to grow developmentally, socially, emotionally, and physically to ensure they arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed.

You and your child are important to us and it is a priority for our staff to build strong relationships with each child and family. We believe that **you** are your child’s first and most important teacher, and your involvement in your child’s education in C&FS programming is necessary for your child’s success.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide you with some basic information about services, activities, policies and our shared responsibilities. Throughout this handbook you will notice references to policies and procedures. We have not included every policy in this handbook, so please contact staff if you have questions or would like to request a copy of any policy. We always appreciate questions and feedback on any C&FS policy.

Supporting School Readiness: Program Features

Child Development

- ☆ Experiences, environments, and supportive relationships that help children explore and learn, including:
 - Routines to support self-control, self-help and peer cooperation.
 - Activities to support literacy, math, science, social studies, creative arts and physical education.
 - Projects that promote problem-solving and initiative.
- ☆ Curriculum is uniquely planned to meet each child's individual needs and promote higher order thinking skills.



Health and Nutrition

- ☆ Nutritious snacks and meals.
- ☆ Physical activities for all age groups.
- ☆ Ongoing connections with parents about their child's health.
- ☆ Support to access medical and dental insurance and related services.
- ☆ Screenings and assessments to learn about each child's growth and development.
- ☆ On-site dental and screening clinics.

Partnerships with Parents

- ☆ We engage families in a formalized goal setting process as we support parents to reach their personal and parenting goals, with regular check-ins to support progress.
- ☆ Sharing child observations with each other.
- ☆ Parent input into curriculum, including family culture and traditions.
 - ☆ Parenting education opportunities.
 - ☆ Sharing community-based activities, services and resources.
 - ☆ Support with transitions, including children's entry into kindergarten.
 - ☆ Support for children's health and developmental needs.
 - ☆ Partnering with all members in a child's life who are connected to their education.



Family Engagement Opportunities

Support your child's school readiness... You are **your child's 1st and most important educator.** Your child is always learning from what you say and do. Some basic ways to model and promote learning include:

- Read books often
- Point out signs, labels and other printed materials
- Talk with your child often, even if he or she can't talk yet
- Ask your child open ended questions
- Verbalize what you or your child is doing, using lots of words to describe what is happening
- Plan and talk about healthy meal choices
- Encourage lots of physical play and exercise
- Talk with your child's teacher about ways to extend classroom activities to home



Maintain regular connections with staff members and discuss important changes, observations, and other information about your child and family. An ongoing conversation between parents and staff helps to ensure that your child's education plan is a match for your child's needs and reflects family goals for each child. More formal **Parent-Teacher Conferences** are held quarterly, two of which are **Home Visits**.

Participate in the classroom, joining for activities, field trips/off-site adventures, or a more formal volunteer placement in C&FS programs. Talk with your child's teacher about your interest in joining the classroom happenings.

Join in **training opportunities** that are provided throughout the year. One training that can result in an employment opportunity is our substitute-training program. We are always looking for parents who are trained and qualify to be a part of C&FS.



Parent Committees are made up of parents enrolled at each program site or option. Staff partner with parents in each site/option to create a Family Engagement Plan each year that best meets the needs of families. The committees are intended to give parents an opportunity to advise staff on the development and implementation of local program policies, activities and services. Your voice matters! Please note that Parent Committees may take on different names: Parent Advisory Group, Family Voices, Family Council, etc. For parents with an interest in health topics, please consider joining our program level **Health Services Advisory Committee**.

The **Policy Council** is a governance committee of C&FS parents, guardians and community representatives who responsibility is to make sure the program has structures (policies, guidelines, plans) that support children and families and follow best practices. Child care is provided for children of parents who are attending Policy Council meetings. Any parent is welcome to visit a Policy Council meeting to see what it's like and participate in discussions.

Parents are encouraged to get involved in the **interview process** for the hiring of program staff.



This is an opportunity to bring a parent's voice to the hiring/recruitment process for program employees, as well as an excellent training/resume opportunity.

Family Engagement Funds are made available by C&FS to support parent enrichment, education, and fees related to field trips/group experiences. Parent Committees decide how their site will use these funds based on the [*Family Engagement Fund Policy*](#).

Program Information

Attendance

Children's learning in school is most effective when they attend regularly. Regular attendance provides your child the opportunity to learn new things, to develop stronger relationships with others, and to learn about school routines and structure. When children will not be attending the program on a scheduled day, parents are expected to notify the site as soon as they are aware of the absence. If there are barriers that prevent regular attendance, staff will work with parents to come up with possible solutions to promote regular participation. See [Attendance Policy](#) for more information.

Arrival/Departure

In **part-day/school-day programs** it is important that children arrive and depart on time. This will help children learn about routines and to maximize the opportunities for learning at school. In **full-day child care programs** there is some flexibility with the schedule to meet family needs, but consistency is very important in this program option as well. Parents work with staff members to develop a schedule that works for their family and their child's developmental needs. Parents are invited to spend time helping children transition into the classroom. Pick-ups and drop-offs can be a good time for a quick check-in with teachers and to schedule a time for longer conversations.

Child Guidance

C&FS supports and guides children's behavior. With this in mind, we have a non-punitive and non-threatening approach to providing behavior guidance, implementing *Conscious Discipline* in our classrooms/settings. We actively teach children strategies to work through their emotions, make choices, and contribute to their "school family". Although we respect each family's unique culture and child rearing practices, we strongly encourage parents to use positive guidance/discipline techniques with their children. Parents must refrain from using negative discipline techniques while at program locations and while on KVCAP premises. Negative discipline techniques include, but are not limited to, loud voices or swearing, shaming, threatening, slapping or spanking. These behaviors may require us to report to the Department of Health and Human Services. See [Child Behavior Guidance Policy](#) for more information. Please connect with a staff member if you are interested in participating in a *Conscious Discipline* overview or would like other information to support child guidance.

Child Images

We regularly take photographs and video documentation of children in our program. We use these images in children's environments to demonstrate child learning and development to promote our programs in various publications (including newspaper and television), as part of video recordings for educational or marketing purposes, and on the KVCAP, Educare Central Maine, and partner websites and Facebook pages. Your permission is required before your child's image can be used for any purpose. See [Consent for Use of Child Image Form](#) for more information.



Clothing

Children should come each day prepared to play and move around, so clothing should be comfortable. Outdoor play is an important part of our program, so children should have appropriate clothing for weather conditions. Please bring at least one complete extra change of clothes, including underwear and socks. To promote learning children regularly participate in activities that may be messy, so clothing often gets dirty through participation in the program.



Communication

We feel the most effective way for parents and staff to work together is to communicate openly and directly. We invite you to share your thoughts with us. Most issues can be resolved immediately if parents and staff discuss them when they arise. If you have a concern, please speak to the program staff as soon as possible. If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can request a meeting with a Supervisor/Manager. See [Grievance Policy for Parents/Guardians](#) for more information.



Confidentiality

We maintain a strict code of confidentiality, which means that we do not provide information about families or children to others without obtaining permission from parents. For this reason, we cannot answer questions about other children and families enrolled in the program. Parents are also expected to protect the confidentiality of others. See [Confidentiality Policy](#) for more information.

Continuity of Care/Primary Caregiving

Young children who experience the world as predictable, supportive, and responsive to their needs will develop stronger emotional foundations that will help them learn. In our settings, children are assigned primary caregivers and stay with the same caregiving team for the first three years of life and then again in the preschool classrooms. This continuity of care/primary caregiving model helps children form healthy, secure attachments to staff which supports children to become active, engaged learners. In addition, any transitions into, within, or from the program are carefully planned to minimize disruptions and ensure that children, parents and staff are fully supported.



Curriculum and Assessment

To support learning for all children, age-appropriate, research-based curriculum is implemented in each setting.

Program Option	Foundational Curriculum
Center-Based Preschool	Opening the World of Learning (OWL)
Center-Based Infant-Toddler	Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers and Twos
HomeStart	Creative Curriculum for Family Child Care
Home Visiting	Parents as Teachers
All	Conscious Discipline

Additional resources are utilized to enhance curriculum and promote specific learning content such as math, physical activity & nutrition, and personal body safety. Teaching teams further individualize curriculum to meet the individual and group needs of children with consideration for:

- ☆ Goals and interests identified by families
- ☆ Supporting Maine's Infants and Toddlers: Guidelines for Learning and Development
- ☆ Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework
- ☆ Maine's Early Learning and Development Standards, Department of Education
- ☆ Public school initiatives and focus areas (i.e. Building Blocks)
- ☆ Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP)

Please share any ideas about what you would like to see in the classroom!

Observations of your child's progress at school are collected throughout the year using an assessment system called *Teaching Strategies Gold*. During parent-teacher conferences you will connect with your child's teacher to discuss successes, any concerns, and plan for what's next. We always welcome your observations from home or with your child in the community - this helps teachers to understand your child better and can support their planning efforts. Ask your child's teacher about receiving observation updates through e-mail!

Diapering/Toileting

We work with families to assist children with diapering/toileting, considering each child's needs. Diapers are available for all children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start at all program sites. C&FS has a standing medical order with our consulting physician for the use of diaper cream for minor skin irritation. Diaper cream must be provided by the parent and we must have written parental permission to apply.

Emergencies

C&FS staff are First Aid and CPR trained, and are trained/prepared to handle emergencies, including health emergencies. We require that family contact information be on file so we know how to reach you, as well as designated emergency contact people we can call if you cannot be reached in the event of an emergency. It is critical that this information is updated whenever a change occurs.

Fees

If your child is attending a full-day child care option, a fee is assessed based either on a fee scale established by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (for State subsidy vouchers and Fedcap) or a private pay fee scale established by Child & Family Services. There are no fees assessed in part-day/school-day or Home Visiting programs. See [*Child Care Payment Policy*](#) for more information.



Health and Wellness

We work with families to make sure that children are connected to health and dental resources in the community. We also work with families to assure that children are receiving regular checkups, immunizations, and screenings. Our program is required to have immunization records on file within 30 days of a child's enrollment, and updated throughout the year. If updated immunization records are not on file, children need to be excluded during a disease outbreak.

In all of our programs we model and teach children about good practices for: hand washing, riding in cars, personal safety, healthy eating, physical

activity, and other ways children can be safe and healthy. Staff model and support daily teeth brushing with appropriate amounts of fluoridated toothpaste for each age group of children.

Our program includes regular support from a mental health consultant who is also available to speak with parents individually and in groups.

Home Visits

Our center-based and family child care based programs include two home visits each year. These visits help teachers and family services staff learn more about each child and how they interact and learn in their home environment. Children often get very excited to show off their space to their teachers! Home visits also promote closer connections between staff and parents, which ultimately helps children's learning.

Illness

Children who are sick or are not feeling well enough to participate in regular indoor and outdoor activities cannot attend the program. There may also be other times when children may be excluded, such as when the child is at risk of spreading an illness to others, when Maine's Center for Disease Control requires it, or when a safety concern exists. See [*Short-term Medical Exclusion Policy*](#) for more information.



Inclusive Programming

Our early care and education programs offer opportunities for all learners to be successful. Health conditions, emotional and behavioral challenges, disabilities, developmental delays, English language learning, and growing up in poverty may all present barriers to learning. Our staff work closely with children, families and other professionals (doctors, mental health consultants, special educators, interpreters, etc.) to assure that individualized strategies are in place to support each child's success in the context of their classroom, child care or playgroup community. We strive for environments in which all children feel safe, accepted, and ready to learn. More information is available, so please be sure to speak with us about special accommodations or considerations that may be needed for your child so we can best provide services. We ask parents to join us in building a sense of community within groups of children to promote this sense of security.

"In-Kind"

This is a term we use to describe time or items that are given to our program to help make your child's experience a more positive one. "In-kind" is important because it helps strengthen our services and we are required to document local donations for our Head Start Grant. Examples of "in-kind" include: volunteering at your child's site, volunteering time at home to complete activities, participating in Parent Committee meetings, reviewing policies and forms, participating in interview committees, and more! Staff will be asking you to sign "in-kind" sheets throughout the year.



Mandated Reporting

We are required by law to report any suspected child abuse or neglect to the Department of Health and Human Services. See [*Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect Policy*](#) for more information.

Meals and Nutrition

The program provides nutritious foods for children, including formula for infants up to 12 months of age. Menus are developed in consultation with a Registered Dietician. Children are encouraged to try all foods and serve themselves when appropriate. If your child has special dietary needs due to

a food allergy and/or medical condition, please speak with staff so that we can work together to complete a special plan in consultation with your child's medical provider. Our program also supports breastfeeding efforts. See [Nutrition Policy](#) for more information about meals and snacks, as well as restrictions on bringing food from home.

Medications: Prescription and Over-the-Counter

We must have written parental permission, as well as written physician's instructions, before any prescription or over-the-counter medicine may be administered to your child. All prescription and over-the-counter medications must be in the original container and will be stored by the program in a locked container that is out of children's reach. In addition, prescriptions must be labeled with the child's name, doctor's name, name of medication, dosage, and directions.

Minor Injuries

When a child receives a minor cut, bump, or injury while at the program, s/he will receive appropriate first aid care. Treatment will be documented and a copy of this documentation will be provided to parents when the child is picked up from the program.

"Peaceable Workplace"



KVCAP supports an environment that ensures the emotional and physical safety and comfort of staff, participants and visitors. Therefore, all language and behaviors must be non-threatening. Alcohol, illegal drugs, guns, knives and other potential weapons are strictly prohibited from the premises. We expect that families display courtesy and respect while on KVCAP premises and at all program locations. In addition, information should be shared with staff whenever there is a "Protection from Abuse" order in place, or when there are circumstances that raise the risk of violence in the home or at the program.

Physical Activity

Active play is important for healthy growth and development of young children, and impacts learning in all other areas. Daily activities are planned in both indoor and outdoor environments, in all weather, that promote health-related fitness and movement skills for all children.



Program Consultants

During the year, we have several experts visit each classroom and conduct observations. These visits help classrooms to run more effectively and offer staff support in their practice.

Program Options: We offer a variety of program options to try and meet the needs of families within the communities we serve. Please ask a staff member to learn more about any of the following options: Home Visiting, center-based child care, home-based family child care, or center/school-based preschool.

Safety

Child safety is a primary concern at all times. The following procedures are in place to maximize child safety:

- For the protection of children, no child shall be released to a parent/person whom we feel may be unable to drive a child home safely. See [Impaired Parent Policy](#) for details.
- Children may be picked up by someone other than parents only when **written permission** is provided. A photo ID is required by any pick-up person who is not known at the site.

- At least two staff members are present on site in center-based options at all times. See [Supervision of Children Policy](#) for details.
- In order to limit who has access to children, many locations keep buildings/rooms locked.
- Many schools require check-in with front desk upon arrival for all visitors.

Parent reminders about safety:

- Do not leave any child in an unattended vehicle.
- Do not leave vehicles idling in parking lots.
- Please use caution in all parking lots, including driving slowly and watching for children.
- Help your child to learn pedestrian safety, including holding their hands to/from buildings, looking both ways before crossing the street, and walking in parking areas.
- Proper car seat use and installation could help protect your child in an accident. If you need help with car seat selection, use, or installment, please let us know.
- We have nonsmoking facilities and campuses. No smoking is allowed in vehicles in and around school buildings.

Staff Expertise

We have a team of highly qualified and experienced professionals on staff. We have specific degree/credentialing/coursework requirements for each position. We go through a lengthy hiring process to assure that program staff members are able to provide quality services to your child and family. Our comprehensive process includes panel interviews, classroom observations, and background checks. There are many opportunities for staff to continue their professional development through on-site trainings and off-site workshops and coursework, where they receive training on numerous topics (i.e. Curriculum/assessment, screenings, health/nutrition, family partnerships).



Transportation

C&FS does not provide transportation to and from its program except to meet individualized needs for playgroup opportunities. In certain instances, travel stipends may be available for parents to support transporting a child to and from Early/Head Start services. We will work with parents to find community resources to help with transportation challenges.



Volunteers

We invite parents, community members, practicum students, Fedcap participants, and others to volunteer in our program. Volunteer placements are made with consideration for the needs of each site and enrolled children, the interests of the volunteer, and the needs and supports of each program. Each volunteer is assigned a supervisor and provided with an orientation. We require volunteers who are present on a regular basis to undergo background checks, review licensing regulations, and review policies and procedures. See [Volunteer Policy](#) for more information.

Site Specific Information:

Program Name/Location:

Program Phone Number:

Program Hours:

Family Services Coordinator:

Phone Number:

Program Supervisor:

Phone Number:

Information in this section is determined by each site location, as applicable:

1. Note from Partner(s),
2. Site Closure/Cancellation Information – all sites.
3. Items from Home Information - all sites.
4. Site Calendar – all sites.
5. Site-specific handbook.
6. Site-specific sign in/out practices.
7. Emergency Response Plans.
8. Other: