

# Looking to the Future:

## Considerations for Becoming an Early Head Start in Family Child Care Provider

EARLY HEAD START FOR FAMILY CHILD CARE PROJECT

### Why Is This Important?

As more and more providers are finding out, Early Head Start (EHS) and family child care are a natural combination. Infants and toddlers thrive in the warm, nourishing environment of family child care. The low ratios of children to caregivers ensure that children get the one-on-one time that is so crucial to their development. Moreover, this close atmosphere promotes bonding and the development of relationships. And as we know, it is in the context of relationships that young children learn and grow.

Partnering with the EHS system is beneficial for you as well, whether you serve as a contractor or become employed by the EHS grantee. All of the quality-building measures that are an integral part of EHS are also extended to you. Moreover, being part of a system affords you benefits you could not obtain on your own. These range from the possibility of a higher income to opportunities for professional development to the strength of a shared voice. In this Tip Sheet we present some important considerations you should examine in deciding whether being an EHS provider is for you.



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### Tips to help you decide if you should partner with EHS:

**Determine if you will be better compensated by being a partner with an EHS program.** When an EHS grantee decides to offer Early Head Start in family child care, it has several options: It can offer family child care using only EHS funds or tap both EHS and child care subsidy funds. It may employ providers as EHS staff or contract with them as independent business operators. Learn what each possibility offers so you can advocate for the arrangement you prefer. Because providers working with EHS may receive both EHS and child care subsidy funds, you may earn more income than you would without the support of these two programs. Moreover, when the EHS grantee uses

a dual funding system, there can be a “fail-safe” option for families and for you. Here’s how it can work: Suppose you have a child care slot filled by a child with a teenage mother who receives subsidy funds to support the care of her child. What happens in the summer when she’s not in school and doesn’t have a job? If you are partnering with EHS, rather than having to deny care you can use EHS funds to cover the period when the family would be ineligible for a child care subsidy. Some EHS programs also set a standard rate that can compensate for state rates that change based on the age of the child. This layering of funding can happen seamlessly so that the change in funding sources

doesn’t affect the family and the child care arrangement remains stable. This way the child, the parent, and you all benefit.

**Consider your needs for higher education and professional development.** Do you want or need to get a CDA? Is it important to you to attend professional conferences and get trained in new methods of nurturing development of infants and toddlers? Do you feel you do your job better when you are current with what is happening in the field? If you answered “yes” to these questions, look into partnering with EHS. Many EHS programs collaborate with other community agencies such as child care

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resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) to provide ongoing professional development, and some work with local community colleges to support CDA training attached to college credit.

**Find out if the EHS program has a lending library of furnishings, materials, and books.** Having appropriate furnishings, materials, and books to read with children can be expensive. If you feel that you could benefit from an enhanced inventory but can't afford to purchase these items, consider partnering with EHS. Many EHS grantees have a lending program that makes materials, equipment, and books available to family child care providers. Some grantees also have funds for providers to purchase equipment for their homes.

**Consider the advantages of having a child development specialist to consult with on a regular basis.** In EHS in FCC programs, a child development specialist comes to your home at least every two weeks. The coaching and mentoring you receive from a trained support person can help you provide even better quality care to children. This may be especially helpful for times when you find yourself caring for a child with a disability, a child who is homeless, or a child with a chronic illness and you have questions about how best to address the child's needs. Reflect on how much you may learn, for example, about offering comprehensive services or doing ongoing screening and child assessment, which will benefit not only the EHS child and family in your home but all children in your care.

**Explore how you could benefit from being in a network of fellow providers.** Many providers choose this occupation because it affords them the opportunity to work on their own; providers relish being responsible for their own work. Even if you enjoy being independent, however, when you work at home alone with children for long hours every day, a network of colleagues can be a lifeline. A network offers support from colleagues and opportunities to hear others' opinions about children's challenging behaviors as well as to see how other providers handle field trips or parent education programs, for example. Providers in networks also share resources and support each other as they work to earn a CDA credential or to achieve accreditation or higher ratings in a state QRIS.

Provider networks also serve members in ways you may not realize. Networks afford members a chance to have a unified voice in advocating for children. Many voices are stronger than one; as a collective, networks can broker deals to purchase needed materials and supplies or even obtain insurance. Banding with other providers makes you stronger together than any provider can be working alone.

## Next Steps:

**Find an Early Head Start program in your area that offers EHS in family child care.** Talk to the staff members about what steps you should take to become an EHS partner. Ask about qualifications and whether they employ or contract with providers. Become familiar with the Head Start Program Performance Standards so you have an idea of what's involved in offering EHS in your family child care home.

**Consider the children and families already enrolled in your family child care home and those on your waiting list.** Could they qualify for both CCDF and EHS? Are they earning less than the federal poverty level and working or in school? Do some of the children have special needs? Are any of them in foster care? How could the children and families in your community benefit if you were an EHS in FCC provider?

**Find out if there is a provider network in your area.** In addition to EHS, local CCR&Rs or National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) affiliates often sponsor provider networks. State child care subsidy agencies, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program sponsors may also host networks. If your local EHS program is not offering EHS in family child care, a network can become an advocate with the EHS grantee for starting one.

## To Find Out More

Review the other the other tip sheets in this series. They can all be found at the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) site, <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc>. Tip Sheet 1 was on partnering, Tip Sheet 2 focused on creating systems for seamless service delivery, and Tip Sheet 3 dealt with making regulations work for you. Even if you've read them previously, you may find new insights by rereading them and by reading them all together.

Locate and look at the Head Start Program Performance Standards. These will give you an overview of what's entailed in partnering with Early Head Start.