

# A Win-Win Partnership: MRE and Head Start

## Benefitting families by working together

Marriage and relationship education (MRE), Head Start and Early Head Start are all educational programs that help strengthen families and promote child well-being. Recognizing this, the National Head Start Association and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) created a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2008 to provide a framework for collaboration between ACF Healthy Marriage/ Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives and Head Start to provide interested families with MRE services. This Tip Sheet will provide a brief overview of how the two programs, working together, can benefit families and how MRE providers can partner with Head Start programs to deliver services.

### Background

Head Start was created in 1965 as a child development program for children ages four and five. Subsequently, Early Head Start was established to serve infants to three-year-old children. For the purposes of this Tip Sheet, Head Start includes Early Head Start. Head Start programs promote school

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readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families. Head Start strives to engage parents in their children's learning and to help them make progress toward their educational, literacy and employment goals; this is called the "family partnerships" component of the program.

Head Start programs are required to engage in collaborative partnerships with parents to establish mutual trust and to identify family goals, strengths, and necessary services and supports. This includes helping parents set family goals, determine responsibilities and timetables, and develop strategies for achieving these goals. In addition, Head Start agencies are required to offer a variety of opportunities for interaction with parents throughout the year and to collaborate with parents to offer services that meet their needs. Marriage and relationship education is one strategy for Head Start programs to involve parents.

MRE is a prevention strategy designed to teach couples skills that can strengthen their relationships. MRE is also used with singles to enhance communication skills and to teach about healthy relationships. Healthy relationships are believed to enhance child well-being by improving family stability. According to Head Start data compiled from annual program information reports, 43 percent of Head Start families are married and 57 percent are single parents. Head Start parents can learn about expectations, problem-solving, commitment, how to have a healthy relationship, and what a healthy relationship means to their children. Further, the skills learned in MRE can complement the parenting, literacy, anger management, nutrition, and budgeting workshops already offered to Head Start parents.

## Approaching Head Start as a Partner

When MRE providers approach Head Start sites, it is helpful to engage the state's Head Start office. Many states have Head Start entities set up to serve in the oversight, advisement and facilitation of stakeholder collaboration. Further, federal grants are available to create state Head Start Advisory Councils, so it may benefit you to research whether or not your state's stakeholders are establishing one. Local, community-based organizations are often collaborators with Head Start and may be involved with your state Head Start advisory body, so it may be helpful to connect

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with them too. Create leadership by identifying and engaging persons in the community who are influential, impassioned, and committed to the goals of the collaborative group. See articles listed in the Additional Resources section of this Tip Sheet to assist you with talking points when approaching Head Start (you may want to bring these as handouts, too).

## Partner Roles

- Most Head Start programs have experience partnering with domestic violence and housing providers, faith-based organizations, businesses and other not-for-profit organizations to meet the needs of their families. MRE can be added to a Head Start program's list of partnerships. One strategy for delivering this service is to have the MRE program provide trained facilitators to deliver MRE to couples/individuals at the Head Start facility. The facility is a place where parents are already comfortable; the trusting relationship parents have with Head Start will likely increase willingness to participate in MRE.
- MRE providers can offer food, door prizes, books, and other resources to parent participants. Head Start can offer child care to encourage participation and advise the MRE provider on the types of food, prizes, and resources families would appreciate most.
- Community partners can be invited to speak to parents about domestic violence, nutrition, health, budgeting and parenting skills—topics that complement the MRE lesson and help the Head Start site meet their parent education goals.
- Upon completion of the workshops, participants can be provided with a certificate of completion and an opportunity to volunteer as a mentor for future workshops.

Once you have decided to partner with a Head Start program, it is helpful to create your own inter-agency memorandum of understanding (MOU). The MOU should:

- List the requirements that the partnership must meet for both programs.
- Develop a shared mission that describes how you are strengthening families in your community.
- Outline the MRE services that will be provided, including the specific population served (expectant couples, teen parents, single parents, etc.), curriculum delivered, amount of class time required, support services offered (like child care and door prizes) and a protocol for addressing domestic violence.
- Create an outreach/advertising campaign.
- List the targeted number of Head Start parents to serve.
- Establish recruitment and referral practices between the organizations.

Head Start and MRE present an opportunity for bridging the gap in services for children and families. These programs are well suited for collaboration in low-income communities where services related to employment, job training, child care, housing, health services, and more are needed to enhance child well-being and improve family stability.

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## Additional Resources

Mills, K. *Something Better for my Children: The History and People of Head Start*, New York: Dutton, 1998.

Head Start/MRE/Fatherhood Memorandum of Understanding

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Family%20and%20Community%20Partnerships/New%20Parental%20Involvement/Healthy%20Marriage>.

The Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (ECLKC) [www.eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov](http://www.eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov).

The Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland Head Start Association for Developing Successful Linkages between Head Start and Public Schools MOU called "Children First, A Vision for All." <http://www.mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/readiness/pdfs/MSDEHeadstart%20Final%20Draft%20MOU2-04.pdf>.