

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 Children's Social-Emotional Development

Key Takeaways

1. Head Start children are more prepared to participate in kindergarten classrooms. They show fewer behavioral problems, are less hyperactive, and are less aggressive.
2. Head Start children are less likely to engage in criminal activities as young adults.

Measurable Impact

Less aggressive

Early Head Start children showed lower child aggression at ages 2 and 3.

Fewer behavior problems

Early Head Start children had significantly fewer social behavior problems.

More attentive

Head Start children are able to pay better attention and have more positive approaches to learning.

31%

Head Start participation reduces engagement in criminal activities for young adults, as they are 31% less likely to have been in a correctional facility by ages 20-21.

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The Head Start Advantage: Success in Children’s Social-Emotional Development

Why is social-emotional development important?

Social-emotional development refers to a child’s ability to create and sustain meaningful relationships and his or her ability to engage with his or her own emotions and the emotions of others.

As young children develop, their early emotional experiences become embedded in the architecture of their brains. Children who are more socially competent display better learning engagement and tend to form more positive relationships with teachers and peers, whereas children who exhibit aggressive or oppositional behavior and attention problems often struggle both socially and academically. In the long-term, social-emotional functioning is associated with key adult outcomes related to education, employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health.

Poverty often increases children’s exposure to multiple stressors, including family instability, crowded living conditions, and community violence.

How does Head Start promote social-emotional well-being?

Supporting children’s social and emotional well-being is an integral part of Head Start’s comprehensive health services.

Head Start does not allow for suspension or expulsion based on children’s behavior. Instead, programs use mental health consultants and establish collaborative partnerships with mental health professionals in order to support children and families. The use of on-site mental health consultation to recognize and address social and emotional needs among Head Start children has been shown to reduce problem behaviors.

Research has shown that positive parenting practices can protect children against the effects of adverse family environments. Head Start improves children’s social and emotional wellbeing both directly and indirectly by: 1) buffering the family from stress through connection with support services; 2) promoting positive relationships between parents and children; and 3) directly enhancing children’s social-emotional skills, such as self-control and managing emotions.



Head Start children have better executive functioning skills and demonstrate more social skills, fewer behavioral problems, and more positive approaches to learning by the end of the program.



Male Head Start participants are less likely to show symptoms of depression at ages 16-17 and are 22% less likely to engage in criminal activities. As young adults, they are also less likely to be both unemployed and not in school.



Early Head Start children are more engaged with their mothers at ages 2 and 3.



Head Start families have fewer family conflicts and fewer parent-child dysfunctional interactions, which in turn, reduce children’s aggressive behaviors.

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.