



# Family Handbook 2025-2026

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## Welcome to Rutland County Head Start

We are pleased that you and your child will be part of our program for 2025-2026! It is our goal that many joyful experiences await your child and family.

Rutland County Head Start provides a positive, safe, and welcoming environment along with highly engaging educational experiences, where all children can dream, believe, and shine.

Head Start believes that families are the primary teachers and nurturers of their children. All Head Start staff work together with your child and family to provide high quality educational opportunities to build relationships that support positive child and family outcomes.

This handbook is a resource to help you to better understand Rutland County Head Start's policies and procedures. We ask that you review this handbook and feel free to ask your child's Teacher or Family Advocate any questions you may have, regarding your participation in the Rutland County Head Start program.

Thank you for choosing our program!

We look forward to providing your child with a caring and welcoming educational environment where all children and families can thrive.



## About RCHS

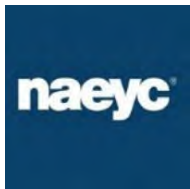
### Philosophy

We believe that high quality, inclusive learning environments that promote children's social and emotional growth, will better prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond. The building of trusting relationships between staff and families is key to positive outcomes for children.

### Mission

A program of Rutland Community Programs, the mission of Rutland County Head Start is to prepare children for a successful school experience through comprehensive, integrated, family-centered early childhood services.

### Accreditation and Quality Rating



Rutland County Head Start is a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accredited program. Receiving NAEYC accreditation means that this Head Start program meets standards that ensure high-quality learning experiences in our early learning program.



Five-STAR (Step Ahead Recognition System) Quality Rating. STARS is Vermont's quality recognition for early care and education programs. Programs that participate in STARS are going above and beyond VT's Child Care Licensing Regulations.

### Vermont Child Care Licensing Regulations

Rutland County Head Start classrooms follow the State of Vermont Child Care Licensing Regulations. A copy of these regulations is available in the classroom or by visiting this link:

<https://outside.vermont.gov/dept/DCF/Shared%20Documents/CDD/Licensing/CC-CenterBased-Regs.pdf>

### Child Care Consumer Help Line

Call 1-800-649-2642 toll free in Vermont to:

- Get information about childcare providers (e.g., when they became licensed, if they are accredited or have a STARS rating, and if they have had any licensing violations in the past year);
- Voice a concern about a provider (e.g., unregulated, lack of supervision, too many children, unqualified or not enough staff, inappropriate guidance and discipline, unsafe environment)
- Make a formal complaint about a childcare provider.

### What are Early Head Start, Head Start and Head Start Performance Standards

Head Start and Early Head Start are programs for pregnant people, families, and their children ages birth to five. Head Start is for children ages 3-5. Early Head Start is for pregnant people and children from birth to age 3. Both programs include support around education, health, nutrition, mental health, and social services to help families and children grow and do well in school and in life. Head Start services are free for all eligible families based on the federal poverty guidelines. Our families incur no cost to attend.

To ensure quality among Head Start programs across the country, the U.S. Administration for Children and Families established guidelines that all programs must follow. These guidelines are called Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS). The Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) set forth the requirements local grant recipients must meet to support the cognitive, social, emotional, and healthy development of children from birth to age five.

## Rutland County Head Start Contact Information

<b>Meadow Street</b>	<b>Children's Discovery Center for Early Learning</b>	<b>Mailing Address</b>
78 Meadow St. Rutland, VT 05701	15 Juneberry Lane Rutland, VT 05701	PO Box 222 Rutland, VT 05702
Main Office: 802-775-8225 Adventurers: 802-665-2602 Innovators: 802-665-2619 Explorers: 802-665-2629 Dreamers: 802-665-2626	Visionaries HS: 802-747-7547  Discovery EHS: 802-722-4699	Fax Number: 802-7474-3583

Email: <a href="mailto:headstart@rmhscn.org">headstart@rmhscn.org</a>	Website: <a href="http://www.Rutlandcountyheadstart.org">www.Rutlandcountyheadstart.org</a>
Facebook: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/RutlandCountyHeadStart">https://www.facebook.com/RutlandCountyHeadStart</a>	

Simply scan to go to website



## Staff DirectoryA

### Family Support Advocates

Alexa Ritchie	<a href="mailto:aritchie@rmhscn.org">aritchie@rmhscn.org</a>	Office: 802.665.2622 Cell: 802-417-6204
Jesse Dodge	<a href="mailto:jdodge@rmhscn.org">jdodge@rmhscn.org</a>	Office: 802-665-2639 Cell: 802-558-9331

### Meadow Street Classroom staff

Innovators – HS		
April Sloan	<a href="mailto:asloan@rmhscn.org">asloan@rmhscn.org</a>	Classroom:802-665-2619 Cell: 802-855-4452
Samantha Neilson	<a href="mailto:sneilson@rmhscn.org">sneilson@rmhscn.org</a>	
Adventurers – HS		
Alyssa Letourneau	<a href="mailto:aletourneau@rmhscn.org">aletourneau@rmhscn.org</a>	Classroom: 802-665-2619 Cell: 802-855-4379
Shannah Hier	<a href="mailto:Shier@rmhscn.org">Shier@rmhscn.org</a>	
Explorers – EHS		
Kylie Constantine-Co-Lead	<a href="mailto:kconstantine@rmhscn.org">kconstantine@rmhscn.org</a>	Classroom: 802-665-2629 Cell: 802-855-4205
Melissa Neilson-Co-Lead	<a href="mailto:mneilson@rmhscn.org">mneilson@rmhscn.org</a>	
Lisa Patterson- Teacher in Training	<a href="mailto:lpatterson@rmhscn.org">lpatterson@rmhscn.org</a>	



Dreamers - EHS		
Joellen Winters- Co-Lead	<a href="mailto:jwinters@rmhscn.org">jwinters@rmhscn.org</a>	Classroom: 802-665-2626 Cell: 802-855-4386
Kylie Moore-Co-Lead	<a href="mailto:kmoore@rmhscn.org">kmoore@rmhscn.org</a>	

### Discovery Center Classroom Staff

Visionaries - HS		
Kelly O'Neill- Lead	<a href="mailto:koneill@rmhscn.org">koneill@rmhscn.org</a>	Classroom: 802-747-7547 Cell: 802-855-4431
Lisa Ebbighausen	<a href="mailto:lebbighausen@rmhscn.org">lebbighausen@rmhscn.org</a>	
Discovery - EHS		
Jessica Christian- Lead	<a href="mailto:jchristian@rmhscn.org">jchristian@rmhscn.org</a>	Classroom: 802-722-4699 Cell: 802-855-4495
Amber Boutwell- Co-lead	<a href="mailto:aboutwell@rmhscn.org">aboutwell@rmhscn.org</a>	
Anika Gillwald- Teacher in Training	<a href="mailto:agillwald@rmhscn.org">agillwald@rmhscn.org</a>	

### Administrative Staff

Position	Name	Contact Info	
Director	Donna Barrow	Office: (802) 665-2608	<a href="mailto:dbarrow@rmhscn.org">dbarrow@rmhscn.org</a>
Family Services Manager	Kristen Nugent	Office: (802) 665-2603 Cell:(802)779-5845	<a href="mailto:knugent@rmhscn.org">knugent@rmhscn.org</a>
Education Manager	Missy Burke	Office: (802) 665-2618	<a href="mailto:burkem@rmhscn.org">burkem@rmhscn.org</a>
Health Services Manager	Angela Goepel	Office: (802) 665-2615	<a href="mailto:agoepel@rmhscn.org">agoepel@rmhscn.org</a>
Administrative Fiscal Coordinator	Jennifer Drew	Office: (802) 665-2631	<a href="mailto:jdrew@rmhscn.org">jdrew@rmhscn.org</a>
Disabilities Manager	Lauren Weiss	Office: (802)665-2634 Cell: (802)855-4268	<a href="mailto:lweiss@rmhscn.org">lweiss@rmhscn.org</a>
Classroom Team Supervisor	Bonnie Wilson	Office: (802) 665-2624 Cell: (802)712-4887	<a href="mailto:bwilson@rmhscn.org">bwilson@rmhscn.org</a>
Classroom Team Supervisor	Courtney Dudley	Office: (802) 665-2625 Cell: TBD	<a href="mailto:cdudley@rmhscn.org">cdudley@rmhscn.org</a>

**A note about RCHS Work Cell Phones:** We are excited to provide cell phones for all our staff this year, as an added safety measure, as well as ease in communication. Family Services has relied very heavily on being able to text families in the past, and it has proved helpful for everyone. We just want to remind you, as these cell phones are for work, they will be **turned off** outside of program hours. You will be able to reach someone while they are in the building (typically 8-4, sometimes later depending on who you are trying to reach), and you are welcome to text anytime you need to! We just want you to know they will only be checked, and responded to, during service hours. Thank you for understanding!



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## Classroom Logistics

### Classroom Schedules

Each classroom schedule varies according to the needs of the children. Classrooms post their individual schedules for all to see. Teachers will provide you with a copy of the daily classroom schedule and the yearly calendar at orientation. Please ask for an additional copy if needed. (See attached for your classrooms schedule)

### Classroom Sign In/Out

Each classroom will have a tablet near your child's cubby. Parents or other authorized individuals are expected to sign each child in every morning at drop off and out every day at pick up time, electronically on the tablet. Please ask your child's classroom teacher for assistance with this process if you have questions or concerns, especially since this procedure is new. This will allow attendance and sign-in/sign-out times to be more accurate and viewed by Family Services in real time to assist with following up with you if your child is absent. If for some reason internet is down, we will have paper attendance sheets available as well.

### Drop Off/Pick Up Parking

At Meadow Street, please use the first double row to park, then use the crosswalk to support dropping off and picking up your child. Please try to avoid parking along the sidewalks as this then creates a sight barrier and hazards for drivers, families, and children.

### Things to Bring (Not Bring)

Please always keep two extra sets of clothing for your child at school. If your child gets wet or very dirty, he/she can change right away for comfort. Include a pair of pants, a shirt, a pair of underpants, and socks.

If your child is using diapers, we will provide diapers for Early Head Start children while they are in our care. Head Start children should bring diapers and pull-ups as they are not providing. Please let your Head Start staff member know what size your child will need. The diapers we provide are either Huggies or pampers, if an alternative is needed, please talk with your child's teacher. We do not supply pull-ups unless they are needed for medical purposes. Please check with your Head Start staff person if you have questions

If your child drinks formula, we will provide formula while they are in our care. We work hard to provide the brand your child uses. If it is a prescription formula, you must provide that while in our care. In addition, we provide bottles for your child. However, we may not be able to accommodate the brand and/or style of bottle your child is used to. Please talk with your Head Start staff person if you have questions.

Please send a tote bag or backpack with your child every day. Your child's name needs to be marked on the bag. The bag is used to send artwork and notes home, so make sure to check it every day. Each child has an individual cubby for their belongings.

It is important to dress your child for weather conditions. When it is winter, please remember mittens, boots, hat, warm coat, and snow pants. Children will be playing outside each day unless there are severe weather conditions. Please do not dress your child in sandals, clogs, or slippery dress shoes. Sneakers are much safer.

**Not Bring:** Children are not allowed to bring toys, money, food, drinks, or candy to school.

## Outdoor Play & Weather

It is important for children to learn outdoors even in all kinds of weather. Children go outside every day, unless it is too cold (below 15 degrees), too hot, or there is a thunderstorm. We will take extra steps to keep children safe in the sun when they are outside. Head Start children are provided rain suits and rain boots.

RCHS will supply sunscreen and bug spray for all children during the summer months. Sunscreen containing DEET is not typically used. Consent is signed by a parent/guardian and obtained yearly for staff to apply sunscreen and/or bug spray. Parents are encouraged to send hats with their children for sunny days and dress their child in cool/light colored clothing. If the temperature reaches levels that are deemed unsafe, scheduled outdoor gross motor time may be shortened or changed indoors. Children have access to drinking water at all times.

## Home-School Connections

### Communicating with Families

Head Start teachers and family support specialists will be in regular contact with you about your child's learning and family needs. Head Start will communicate with you in the following ways:

- Telephone
- Email
- Text messages/TalkingPoints messages
- Notes in your child's backpack
- Regular newsletters
- Parent meetings



\*We will soon be launching a new messaging app through our child records system, Child Plus. More to come on this soon!

### Home Visits & Parent Teacher Conferences

The purpose of the home visit is to help you set your home up as a learning environment and foster the growth and development of your child. You will be your child's teacher long after your child leaves our program. We want

to help you think about how to make the most of this important role. Both your Family Advocate and your child's classroom teacher need to complete home visits.

Classroom teachers will meet with you twice a year for Parent Teacher Conferences. December 23<sup>rd</sup> is a planned Parent Teacher Conference Day focused solely for these meetings. You will discuss your child's learning and progress. This is a great opportunity for you to ask questions, share feedback, and learn ways you can help your child continue learning at home.

## Parent/Guardian Conduct

### Social Media: Parents & Staff

Rutland County Head Start discourages employees from connecting with families on social media platforms including; Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat etc. Having families of enrolled Head Start children as online "friends" poses a professional boundary issue for Head Start's staff. Please respect this boundary and know that we offer times for interaction with you and your child every day and invite you to interact with Head Start's staff during family engagement activities.

### Smoking/Vaping/Prohibited Substances

Head Start is tobacco free! There is no smoking/vaping allowed at any Head Start event or location. This includes classrooms, group activities, parent meetings, parking lot and offices.

Alcohol or illegal drugs are not allowed at any Head Start activity or location. If anyone comes to a Head Start event while using alcohol or drugs, appears inebriated, intoxicated, or impaired will be asked to leave. If the person does not leave, staff will call the police to assist.

### Professional Behavior

RCHS adheres to VT Child Care Licensing Regulations regarding disruptive and dangerous behavior. Head Start is a place of safety, mutual respect and dignity and strives to provide the most appropriate environment in which a child can grow, learn, and develop. Achieving this environment is the responsibility of all Rutland County Head Start employees, in partnership with each family member.

An incident of hostile and aggressive behavior is not tolerated at Head Start. If an incident of hostile or aggressive behavior occurs, Head Start staff reserves the right to ask you to control your behavior, limit or restrict access to the facility, report the incident to authorities and to remove your child from our care.

**5.10.1.15 Disruptive or Dangerous Behavior-** The licensee shall prohibit any person, including but not limited to parents, staff, partner staff or volunteers, from the CBCCPP and property, when his/her presence or behavior disrupts the program, distracts the staff from their responsibilities, intimidates or promotes fear among the children and/or staff, or when there is reason to believe that his/her actions or behavior presents a risk of harm to children present.

**Please note: Rutland County Head Start has a "No Weapons" Policy. No weapons including firearms, hunting knives, archery equipment or weapon accessories such as ammunition are allowed on property.**

## Education Services

### Play-Based Early Education

In Head Start and Early Head Start, our goal is to help your child grow and develop. We know that you are your child's first and most important teacher. We believe that young children learn best when they play. Children learn by exploring, trying new things, and asking questions. When children play, they use their imaginations, bodies, power of choice, and problem-solving skills. This helps them to become good learners. In Head Start we focus on areas of child development:

1. Social and emotional
2. Different ways to learn
3. Language and Literacy
4. Physical development
5. Logic and reasoning
6. English (if your family's main language is not English)



Rutland County Head Start provides experiences to help children develop in these areas. Your child will have fun and learn new skills at the same time.

### Screening & Assessment

Within 45 days of your child's enrollment in our program, your classroom teacher will support you in completing two screenings for your child. There are questionnaires that you will fill out letting us know about the things your child can already do. This short screening is to help show any areas where he/she may need some help or more practice. The screening tools used are Ages & Stages Developmental Screener and Ages & Stages Social Emotional Screener.

Head Start Classrooms complete three other assessments throughout each year and Early Head Start Classroom complete four assessments. The assessment tool used is Teaching Strategies GOLD. These assessments use observations, work samples and notes from your child. This helps us to know your child better so we can better meet their needs. We will ask for your help to complete these assessments because you know the most about your child. All this information is used to create lesson plans that support your child, help your child feel good about their play, and that our experiences help your child to grow and learn best.

### Field Trips & Outings

At times, classrooms may go on a walk around the neighborhood. Parents will be notified of larger field trips and permission slips will be sent home for your child to participate in the field trip. Parents are invited to share in the field trip.

### Positive Behavior Supports: Promoting Social & Emotional Development with the Pyramid Model

RCHS uses the Pyramid Model and a Positive Behavioral Intervention System (PBIS) to teach and promote social and emotional learning for all enrolled children. The Pyramid Model is a framework for supporting the social and emotional development of our children. The goal of the Pyramid Model is to create an environment where every

child feels good about coming to school. This is accomplished by designing classrooms that promote engagement in learning and by building relationships among children, families, and staff. The classroom staff will work together to ensure that all children understand behavior expectations, receive instruction in social skills, and those who are struggling receive individual support.

What is gained by using the Pyramid Model?

- Families receive information on how to promote children's social and emotional skills
- Promotes family and teacher teaming to help children grow and learn
- Tools for families & teachers to prevent, support and address problematic behavior
- Effective social and emotional skill development tools
- Positive classroom management skills
- Information and resources to support families and children
- Improved Kindergarten readiness.



## Mental Health Services

Head Start regulations require a mental health consultant to provide two individual classroom observations per program year to focus on the environment, teacher/child relationships, and the teaching of social and emotional skills. At registration families complete a Mental Health Release Form for general classroom observations. Individual child observations are also available at the request of the parent/guardian or teacher and must have an additional mental health release form completed. For more information, or to request services, talk to your child's Head Start teacher or your Family Advocate.

## Family Services

### Social Services Support & Referrals

Head Start is for the Whole Family! We believe that all children and families have strengths that can help them be successful. We also know it can be hard to raise a family with young children. RCHS wants to help families grow and find the support and resources they need. We help families identify family, friends, and community resources. We find the best way to help families is through consistent, two-way, open, and honest communication. Head Start works to build supportive, caring, and respectful partnerships with parents that focus on their abilities. Together we help families build resources, so every child has the best chance for success in school and life.

Social service needs are different for every family and could include help finding resources for:

- housing issues
- fuel assistance
- transportation
- health services 18
- alcohol or substance abuse services
- domestic violence services; or
- other social service issues



If you need help with something right away, please call 2-1-1. This statewide hotline can provide information and referrals to connect you with resources in your community. [Rutland Area Community Resource Guide.pdf](#)

### Family Goal Setting & Partnership Agreements

When you think about what you would like for your child and family in one year, two years, or even five years, you are thinking about family goals. RCHS can help your family set goals and work towards making them happen. We call these Family Partnership Agreements, and we use them to help families in figuring out their strengths and challenges, set goals for the future, and make plans to meet those goals. These goals are identified and developed by you for your family. They could include things like reading with your child every day, finding better housing, learning computer skills, making a household spending plan, or cooking more meals at home. Your Family Advocate will work in partnership with you during your child's time at Head Start to complete a Family Partnership Agreement; to identify and support goals for your child, your family, or yourself.

### Child Custody

The Vermont Child Care Regulations require that Head Start gather and maintain a certified copy of the most recent court order, or court-ordered visitation schedule for each child. Without a certified court document Head Start will assume that both parents/guardians have equal rights to custody and Head Start will not accept the responsibility of deciding which parent/guardian has legal custody. Head Start is legally bound to respect the wishes of parents/guardians with legal custody based on a court order. Head Start will adhere to the schedule on the certified court document as it applies to pick up and drop off schedules.

### Parent Committee

All Current family members are Committee members and are encouraged to participate in Parent Committee meetings. Each classroom's Parent Committee gives families of enrolled children the opportunity to help develop parent activities, field trips, and classroom activities. Families are asked to complete a survey to help determine the best days and times for the meetings. If you are not able to attend the Parent Committee meetings but have ideas to share, let your Family advocate know. Parent workshops and training will also be scheduled for each site throughout the program year.

## Policy Council

Every Head Start program has a Policy Council. The Policy Council is similar to a school board or “PTO” for the Head Start 20 program. Policy Council members include parents whose children are enrolled in the program and people from the community elected by Policy Council parents. Family representatives are nominated and elected each fall during Parent Committee meetings. Policy Council representatives meet monthly from September to June to assist in program decision making. Policy Council members are responsible for the direction of the Head Start programs. The Rutland Community Programs Inc. (RCP). The board is the governing body that has legal and fiscal responsibility to administer and oversee the RCP agency’s Head Start program.

## Volunteers

Rutland County Head Start encourages all family members to be actively involved in their child’s early education experience. Volunteers participate in various roles in the classroom, family engagement activities, community events, school projects and home-based projects. Please ask your child’s teacher or your Family Advocate to know if you would like to volunteer at Head Start.

## Health Services

### Screenings

Within 45 days of your child enrollment in our program, your family advocate will work with our Health Manager to complete hearing, vision, heights, and weights. If your child does not pass a vision or hearing screening, they will be rescreened after 30 days.

Vision Screening: For children over 6 months of age, we use a Spot Vision Screener that can predict how well your child’s eyes work. It also checks to be sure the two eyes are working together. For children under 6 months of age, we will ask you questions about the child’s vision to determine if any follow-up is needed.

Hearing Screening: We use a machine called an OAE to check the hearing of children of all ages. This machine uses a small ear bud and plays low sounds. The machine tells us if the child’s ears are working well.

### Child Immunizations

Your child’s immunization status will be reviewed during the recruitment and registration process to ensure that your child’s vaccinations are in-compliance with Vermont State Laws.

### Child Physicals and Dental

Vermont Child Care Licensing requires children to be up to date with physical exams, based on their age, within 45 days of enrollment. Physical exams, also called well-child exams, are visits your child has with their doctor when they are not sick. Sometimes they will get shots at these visits, but not always. Your child is required to be up to date with their yearly well-child exam

Another one of Head Start’s main goals is that your child is up to date with dental exams. It is recommended that all children visit the dentist every six months beginning at age 1. If your child does not have a dentist a Head Start staff person can help you find one. Classrooms also engage in daily tooth brushing.



## Nutrition Services

RCHS participates in the Child & Adult Food Care Program, CACFP, through the Vermont Department of Education and the United States Department of Agriculture, USDA. **The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.**

All children enrolled in RCHS are eligible to receive meals and snacks at no cost. Children will be served a minimum of two nutritious meals and one afternoon snack each school day, unless it is an early release day which will be indicated on the menu.

Meals prepared are low in sugar, salt, fat and limited processed foods. Children are offered a variety of foods to broaden their food experiences. All meals are served 'family style' where children learn to pass food at the table and serve themselves with supervision. Caregivers are welcome to join meals with their child and support the classroom.

RCHS does not allow food from home to be brought into the classrooms.

## Policies & Procedures

### Confidentiality

Families and children enrolled in Head Start have the right to the protection of personal information. Parents should be the primary source of information about themselves, and information sought from them should be limited to that which is essential for service.

The privacy and confidentiality of each Head Start family is of primary importance. No volunteer or staff member of Rutland County Head Start may use information obtained at Head Start for his or her own personal use. A photo release form is presented at the time of enrollment but can be updated or revoked at any time. Taking pictures and videos of children and families is not allowed by Head Start unless written permission is obtained by all affected parties involved.

All RCHS staff are required by law to share certain information in situations where there is suspected child abuse or neglect or risk of harm to individuals. RCHS does not need your permission to share these concerns with the appropriate authorities. You will get a copy of your rights about information related to your child and family every year. If your child will be going to Kindergarten, RCHS will share information about your child's educational experience with their next school unless a parent or legal guardian notifies the program in writing that they do not want the information shared.

### Mandated Reporting- Child Abuse & Neglect

All Rutland County Head Start staff, substitutes, consultants, and volunteers are mandated reporters. The Vermont mandated reporting law states "all mandated reporters are legally required to report suspected child abuse and neglect to DCF's Family Services Division within 24 hours."

Once a mandated report has been made, the Vermont Department of Child and Family Services will determine appropriate action. Head Start must cooperate fully with the investigation and will maintain confidentiality concerning any report of child abuse or neglect.

If you have questions about the Vermont mandated reporting law, information can be found by visiting the state website: [dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/report/mandated](http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/report/mandated). You can make a report or learn more about the mandated report process by calling 1-800-649-5285.

## Standards of Conduct

All Rutland County Head Start staff, consultants, volunteers, and substitutes agree to follow our Rutland County Head Start Standards of Conduct Policy. This means they agree to:

- Follow our Confidentiality Policy
- Never assume things about a child or family based on gender, race, ethnic background, culture, religion, family make-up or disability
- Never leave a child alone or unsupervised
- Use positive teaching methods with children and never hurt a child, physically or emotionally
- Never try to teach a child to behave by isolating them, or by using food as a punishment or reward, or by denying them basic needs
- Use truthful information to only enroll eligible children and families.

## Inclusion & Non-Discrimination

Rutland County Head Start believes that children of all ability levels are entitled to the same opportunities for participation, acceptance and belonging in our program. We will make every reasonable accommodation to encourage full and active participation of all children in Head Start based on his/her individual capabilities and needs. Furthermore, RCHS adheres to the Vermont Childcare Regulations position on non-discriminatory enrollment: 3.5 Non-Discriminatory Enrollment The licensee shall not deny a child's entry into the program because of race, creed, color, national origin, religion, disability, gender or the parents' marital status or gender identification.

## Attendance & Participation

Rutland County Head Start wants to keep your family in our program for the full program year. When your child comes to school or childcare regularly, he or she will be more successful in the classroom and be better prepared to go to Kindergarten. If your child is in a classroom, they should try to go to school every day that the program is open, unless they are sick.

Head Start begins at **8:00 am**. All children should be in their classroom as close to 8:00 am as possible. Pick up is at **2:00 pm**. If a child has not been picked up within fifteen minutes of closing time (2:00pm) and we have not heard from you, we will attempt to contact you, and the contacts listed on the Authorization and Consent Form(s). If after 45 minutes we have not been able to reach you, or a person listed as an emergency contact, the Rutland City Police Department will be notified and will take charge of the situation.

Attendance Plan: If we are unable to reach you after three consecutive days of absence, we are required to visit your home for a welfare check. If we are unable to make contact at that visit, we will contact the Police to perform a well-check and continue with guidance accordingly. Upon contact, we will schedule a meeting to develop an attendance plan for you and your child to obtain successful attendance and communication.

## Permission to Pick Up/Permission to Transport/ Emergency Contacts

Each child will have an Authorization and Consent Form. You (the parent or legal guardian) fill out and sign this form during open house/registration. Staff will only let children leave with the people you list on this form. People picking up children will need to show ID if the staff do not know who they are. Please notify your pick-up person of our policy. Parents must fill out new forms any time they want someone new to pick up their child.

You must have two adults (other than the legal parents/guardians) listed as Emergency Contacts for your child on this form. The State of Vermont requires we have this information for every child in our program. Emergency Contacts must be able to pick up your child if there is an emergency. Please let these Emergency Contacts know you have listed them on this form.

RGHS does ask permission on the Authorization and Consent form for permission to treat your child in an emergency, including transporting. This gives permission if your child needs to be transported by ambulance but also if we need to evacuate the location for an emergency.

## Program Delays & Closures

During the winter months, RGHS will follow the same school delay and closure judgements as Rutland City Public Schools. RGHS may have other reasons for program closures. Any program closures can be located on the following locations:

**WCAX School Closures website: [www.wcax.com/weather/closings](http://www.wcax.com/weather/closings)  
Rutland County Head Start Facebook page**

## Sick Policy

For the safety of all, children and their family members who are sick or who are contagious (have something that can be passed on to others), should not go to school or any Head Start activities. If you think your child is beginning to get sick or is sick, please keep them at home.

RGHS follows Vermont State Child Care Licensing Regulations. Caring for our Children, a resource publication written by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2019 offers the following guidance for consideration when determining a temporary exclusion:

- Does the condition prevent the child from participating comfortably in activities?
- Does the condition result in a need for care that is greater than the staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of the other children?
- Does the condition pose a risk of spreading a harmful illness to others?

Please do not bring your child to Head Start if he/she:

- Is too sick to take part in regular activities.
- Has signs of a sickness that can be spread, like a fever (101 oral or forehead, 100 degrees for underarm or higher), sore throat, throwing up, or diarrhea.
- Has something that can be given to others like: COVID-19, Chickenpox, Ringworm, Hand Foot and Mouth, or Strep Throat.

RGHS reserves the right to require a note from the child's physician in order for the excluded child to return to school.

When a child in a classroom is found to have a communicable disease, parents will be notified, and the child will be sent home. All families in the classroom will receive a notice if their child has been exposed to a communicable disease. No exceptions are made to this policy. Head Start follows the State of Vermont Licensing rules about keeping sick children out of the classroom.

### Accidents at School

If your child has an accident or is injured during the school day, the parent or guardian will be notified, and an 'Accident and Injury Report' will be sent home with the child at the end of the day.

### Medication Policy

Staff may administer a prescribed medication to a child when the parent or guardian is unable to administer the medication at home or outside of school hours and only when it is authorized by the child's health care provider.

Before any medications can be given to a child:

- An Individual Health Plan, Asthma Action Plan or other plan must be completed by the child's physician and signed by the parent or guardian.
- The medications must be in the original container prescribed to the child.
- If your child requires a rescue medication such as an Asthma inhaler or EpiPen, the plan must be signed, and the medication must be on site for the child to attend.

The first dose of any new medications must be given at home where the child's parent or guardian may observe them for any possible adverse reactions. The only exception to this is a newly prescribed rescue medication.

### Holiday & Celebrations Policy

Head Start knows that holidays, religious activities, and birthdays are important parts of family life. However, we serve families with many different backgrounds and traditions. We do not want any child or family to feel that their background or tradition is not as important as anyone else's. Specific holidays and religious days will not be observed at any Head Start event or classroom. Classroom can celebrate birthdays in the classrooms through experiences. No special food or treat will accompany, and no outside food is allowed due to our CACFP program.

### Behavior Guidance Policy: Suspension & Expulsion

RCHS promotes and supports a proactive approach to behavior guidance that supports the learning and practice of pro-social behavior. RCHS uses the framework of the Pyramid Model to form close and secure relationships with children and families and provides experiences for children to practice expressing and regulating emotions while exploring the environment and learning.

RCHS follows Vermont State Child Care Licensing Regulations and recognizes the promotion of social and emotional skills. RCHS strives to promote a program wide culture that supports social and emotional well-being, children's mental health and family engagement. We adhere to the following: All children are treated with dignity and respect. RCHS utilizes an evidence-based framework; The Pyramid Model approach, for promoting social and emotional competence and addressing challenging behaviors, and positive behavior supports.

RGHS does not suspend, expel, reduce hours, or send children home because of challenging behavior. RGHS follows Acts 35 and 166, which relate to the Task Force on Equitable and Inclusive School Environments. These acts prohibit the suspension or expulsion of students unless the student poses an imminent threat of harm or danger to others in the school. RGHS follows the “due process requirements” of these acts, and its own Protocol for Promoting Positive Behavior when considering suspending or expelling a student as outlined in Acts 35 and 166. More information can be found here: <https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-k-to-age-8-suspension-andexpulsion-definitions-data-collection-and-reporting.pdf>

## Visitation Policy

Family Engagement is the cornerstone of the Head Start program. Families are welcome to visit their children at Head Start during our program hours. Teachers will always do their best to speak with families during pick up and drop off time, however, since staff are devoted to caring for children at these times, it is not the best time to have long discussions. If a discussion requires time and privacy, please arrange a meeting with the teacher or request that a family advocate speak with you.

## Grievance / Complaint Procedure

The grievance procedure is a problem-solving mechanism in which every attempt is made to resolve issues at the lowest level of authority, with the least possible amount of program disturbance. A grievance is a written complaint alleging that Head Start Regulations, Program Policies and Procedures or Vermont Center Based Child Care Licensing Regulations were:

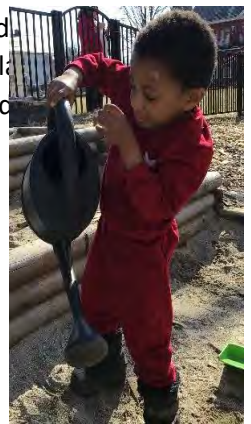
- a) Not followed; or
- b) Administered in a discriminatory (unequal) fashion; or
- c) Were administered in an arbitrary and capricious (unfair) fashion.

Head Start family complaints should first be discussed with the staff person most directly involved in the concern. If no resolution is reached, the concern will be taken to the Classroom Supervisor. The classroom supervisor will follow up on the situation, as necessary. A verbal or written response will be provided to the parent within 3 business days.

The hierarchy of authority to resolve parent and/or community grievances is as follows:

- Originator (parent or community person) and staff person
- Classroom Supervisor
- Rutland Community Programs / Rutland County Head Start Director
- Policy Council
- Chief Executive Officer of Community Care Network
- Rutland Community Programs, Inc. Governing Board

Rutland County Head Start Parent and Community Complaint forms are available at each site on the parent board, with stamped and addressed envelopes. Community complaints will be forwarded to the Policy Council and addressed accordingly.



## Meadow Street Doors

Head Start's Meadow Street center uses a magnetic card system to enter the building. The front door now has a card system too. This door will be unlocked at 7:45 to 2:30. Only staff members with a magnetic card can enter using the interior first or second floor doors. The interior doors will be unlocked from 8:00 am to 8:30 am, and every afternoon from 1:45pm to 2:00pm. A video intercom system is at the front door, first and second floor interior doors. If dropping off outside of these hours, please use the intercom to be let in.

## Emergency Procedures

In the event that RCHS determines that there is an emergency, each site/classroom will follow the steps outlined in the Emergency Procedure Manual which is found in each classroom. The definition of an 'emergency' is as follows; a serious, unexpected situation requiring immediate action. Each classroom participates in monthly drills. Children practice evacuating the building in an event that there is an emergency, such as:

- a fire
- other event which requires exiting the building
- an event that requires 'shelter-in-place' or lockdown drills

What parents need to know in the event of an emergency:

- Family members/caregivers will be notified according to order of the contacts listed on the Authorization and Consent form filled out during registration. Please ensure that all phone numbers for contacts listed are kept up to date.
- Family members/caregivers may contact their child's school/classroom using the numbers provided in the Parent Handbook.
- All classroom staff and members of the onsite management team are certified in Adult/Pediatric First Aid and CPR, by a certified Instructor.
- In the event that it is not safe to remain in the building, all children and staff will walk to an off-site location.
  - Meadow Street children/staff will relocate to the Head Start site at Discovery, 5 Juneberry Lane, Rutland VT.
  - Discovery Center children/staff will relocate to the Head Start site at 78 Meadow St., Rutland VT

### **Notification in case of emergency or non-weather-related closure**

RCHS will notify all families in the case of an emergency or non-weather-related closure in the following manner: All families will receive a phone call or text according to their preferred method of contact, to the emergency contact phone number indicated on each child's Authorization and Consent form(s). Please ensure your contact information is up to date.

## Lead Testing of Water

All Rutland County Head Start classrooms follow the State of Vermont's Child Care Licensing Regulations. Lead is a harmful substance that can make people very sick, especially children. Vermont law requires that we test all water taps used for drinking, cooking, and tooth brushing for lead. You can find the results of water testing here: [leadresults.vermont.gov/](http://leadresults.vermont.gov/)

## U.S.D.A Child & Adult Care Food Program

USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program information for caregivers.

Rutland County Head Start participates in the U.S.D.A. Child and Adult Care Food Program, or CACFP. All enrolled children are eligible for free meals and snacks. The program does not keep any eligible children from participating and follows the statement below:

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at:

- <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>
- from any USDA office
- by calling (866) 632-9992
- by writing a letter addressed to USDA.

The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

mail:

U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or

fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or

email: [Program.Intake@usda.gov](mailto:Program.Intake@usda.gov)

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

12/09/2022



### **Early Head Start Classrooms Daily Schedule**

8:00-8:15	Arrival & Family Partnership Experience
8:15-9:00	Breakfast
8:45-9:00	Enjoying Stories and Books
9:00-10:00	Inside Exploration
10:00-10:30	Outside Exploration
10:30-11:00	Inside Exploration
11:00-11:15	Enjoying Stories and Books
11:15-11:45	Lunch
11:45-1:30	Quiet Experiences
1:30-1:45	Snack
1:45-2:00	Indoor Motor Experiences
2:00-2:15	Family Partnership Experience

### **Head Start Classrooms Daily Schedule**

8:00-8:15	Arrival & Parent Partnership Experience
8:15-9:00	Breakfast
8:45-9:00	Morning Circle
9:00-10:00	Outside Exploration
10:00-11:00	Inside Exploration
11:00-11:15	Music and Movement
11:15-11:45	Lunch
11:45-12:00	Enjoying Stories and Books
12:00-12:30	Quiet Experiences
12:30-1:30	Outside Exploration
1:30-1:45	Snack
1:45-2:00	Closing Meeting