



FOSTER PARENT

SCHOOL READINESS HANDBOOK



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A MESSAGE TO FOSTER PARENTS

We believe that by changing the beginning, you can change the whole story. That is why we support our youngest learners, children birth through age five. Because parents are a child's first teacher, this publication was prepared as a resource for all foster families, licensed by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), who are parenting young children placed by CHILDNET, INC. Our goal is to explain how these children and their foster parent(s) may access the Broward County early care and education system and the other related programs available to them. Ensuring children are ready for kindergarten sets them on a path to success; and it changes the whole story to come.

The EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF BROWARD COUNTY, Inc. (ELC) contracts with FAMILY CENTRAL INC. to administer several important school readiness programs. These services include: child care resource and referral, family education supports, school readiness financial assistance, access to Voluntary Pre-kindergarten (VPK), developmental screening and assessments, and an early childhood resource library that is free to all residents.

Other important programs mentioned in this packet and available to benefit young children in the foster care system are the CHILDREN'S DIAGNOSTIC & TREATMENT CENTER's Early Steps Program, providing developmental early intervention services, BRIDGES Certified Child Care Centers and the BROWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS' preschool programs which include Head Start, Early Head Start and Special Education and Support.

Family Central, ChildNet, the ELC and other community partners have united to assist foster parents to fulfill the vital role and valuable service they provide our children and community. Each participant in this collaboration is committed to enabling children in the foster care system to become healthy, accomplished, responsible and successful adults. As a foster parent, understanding of and participation in the education of these children is critical to their success.

We hope this information is a helpful resource as you make important decisions regarding the early care and education of the young abused, neglected and abandoned children in your home. Thank you.

- The BRIDGES Partners



Updated June 2013

THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY LEARNING

Simply put, a child's early years lay the foundation for all that is to come.

- Although most of the brain's cells are formed before birth, most of the connections among cells are made during infancy and early childhood.
- Early experience and interaction with the environment are critical in an infant's brain development.
- Healthy brain development is built on the small moments that parents and caregivers create as they interact with a young child.
- Talking to and reading to preschoolers establishes foundations for acquiring language during early, critical periods when learning is easiest for a child.
- Children most need loving care and new experiences.

A baby's brain is a work in progress. In fact, the opportunity to continuously acquire new information and repeat these learning experiences is critical. *Early learning inspires more learning.*

RESOURCE LIBRARY

The Family Central Resource Library is *free* to all Broward County residents upon proof of residency. The library has over 26,000 items that can be borrowed for up to two weeks for free.

These items include games, videos, books and educational materials. If you feel that you would like to explore these materials, you are encouraged to stop by!

Find more information available at:

<http://www.familycentral.org/resourcelibrarybc>



SCHOOL READINESS

The science of early development is ignored if we begin our focus on children's education only when they begin kindergarten. All of a child's early experiences, whether at home, in childcare or in other preschool settings, are formative and educational. When these experiences are consistent, developmentally sound, and emotionally supportive, there are positive effects on children. However, many children, including those in foster care, enter kindergarten with limitations in their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.

The Child Welfare League defines five universal needs of all children:

1. *The very basics of proper nutrition, economic security, adequate clothing and shelter, appropriate educational opportunities, and primary and preventive physical and mental health services.*
2. *Strong nurturing relationships within their families, their communities and their peer groups.*
3. *Opportunities to develop their talents and skills and to contribute to their communities; children with indications of disability need early evaluation and intervention to prevent later, more serious problems.*
4. *Protecting children from injury, abuse and neglect, as well as from exposure to violence and discrimination.*
5. *Easing the effects of any harm suffered for children we have been unable to protect by providing emotional support and addressing their physical and mental health needs.*

Foster parents respond to each of these critical needs. Having opened their hearts and homes for children who need healing and hope, they are responsible for nurturing the young minds and bodies of those we were unable to protect.

Although an individual child's school readiness is shaped by the environment in which he or she lives and grows, exposure to early care and education programs are an important influence, fostering fundamental cognitive, social and emotional skills children need for a successful transition to kindergarten. These programs allow young children opportunities to positively interact with others, pay attention, remember lessons, follow directions, finish tasks, and practice what they have learned. They reinforce children in managing their behaviors and emotions, solving problems and focusing on the learning experience.

Early care and education programs further support children's "school readiness" by encouraging their:

- ☐ excitement about learning;
- ☐ willingness to try new things and to keep trying, even if at first difficult;
- ☐ ability for self-expression, in a variety of ways (language, play, make believe, singing, dancing, coloring);
- ☐ familiarity with words and books;
- ☐ awareness of shapes, sizes and colors;
- ☐ recognition that numbers have meaning and learning to count;
- ☐ self-help skills.

Children also need a healthy body to learn and grow: proper diet and good nutrition, adequate rest, routine healthcare (medical, dental, hearing and vision). Our community's early care and education programs promote the early identification of developmental concerns by offering developmental screenings, and when indicated, an early intervention referral. Through high quality child care and early learning services, foster parents have allies and advocates to ensure that the children in their care are prepared to learn and to succeed in school and in life.

HIGH QUALITY CHILD CARE

The community came together to develop a credentialing system to identify child care centers that are able to reflect the children's unique needs and ensure consistency.

Level 1 (Foundational): Child Care Center/Licensed Family Child Care Home (NAEYC, APPLE, NAC and COA) and/or Quality Counts Rating of Three, Four or Five Stars, with basic parent involvement, staff trained to understand the unique needs of children in the Foster Care System as well as in the System itself.

Level 2 (Social-Emotional): Builds on the strengths of level 1 and the social emotional development of the child is integrated in daily practice. The centers will implement an evidence-based social-emotional program such as Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).

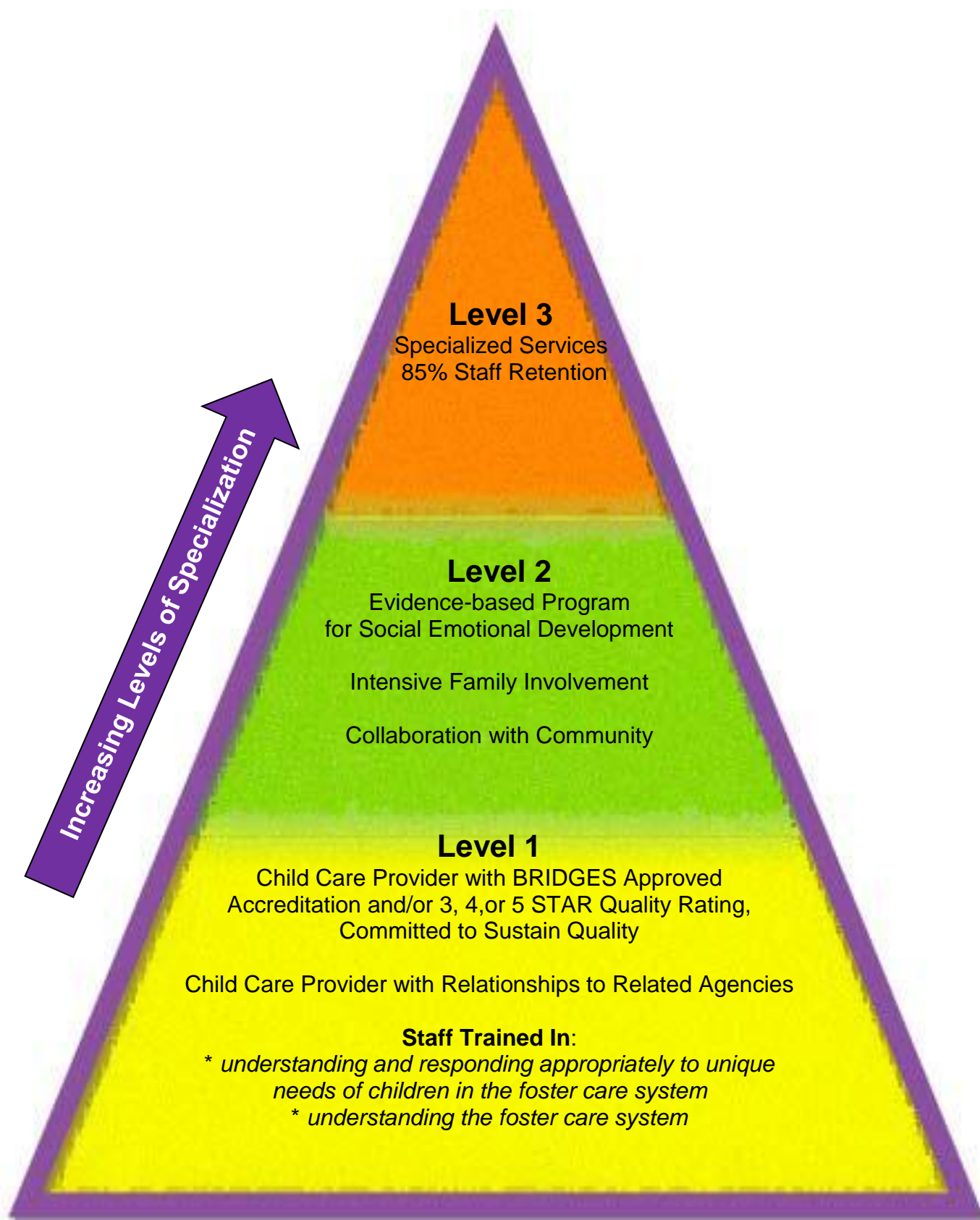
Level 3 (Workforce): Builds on the strengths of levels 1 and 2. Level 3 includes focus on professional development of the staff in the following topics, but not limited to: trauma/abandonment/attachment, behavioral issues, inclusion, and supervised visits; and reduction of staff turnover.



A quality early learning environment will set the groundwork for success for children in the foster care system. It will help ensure that the child care program is able to effectively address the child's unique social/emotional needs. It will help facilitate the stability of placement that is so important for a young child's development.

To help foster parents, child welfare workers, and the dependency court system identify child care programs that have trained staff and an appropriate program that can meet the needs of children in the foster care system, child care programs will be certified as "BRIDGES Centers."

BRIDGES Certification Pyramid



CHILD CARE RESOURCE & REFERRAL (CCR&R)

Family Central provides CCR&R as a free service to any Broward County family with children, age's birth through 12 years of age, seeking information and referral services for child care, school readiness, quality child care programs and out-of-school-time solutions. Referrals are available to all legally operating early care and education and school-age programs, as well as other family strengthening resources.

Family Central welcomes working with foster parents. When children are in a foster placement, the ChildNet Child Advocate submits a child care referral. Upon receipt of this information, a Family Central Child Care Resource and Referral Counselor contacts the foster parent to discuss specific provider options, the importance of choosing quality child care and schedules an appointment with an Eligibility Counselor. Foster parents are encouraged to respond to this call as promptly as possible. **The Family Central Resource and Referral Department staff are available at (954) 724-4609 between 7:30a.m. and 6:00p.m., weekdays.**

The Resource and Referral Counselor assists in evaluating potential child care providers and making an informed decision in determining the learning environment that will be best for the child in your care. This discussion will also include consideration of any developmental disabilities/medical conditions that may be factors. The resource information that is provided, including listings of local child care centers, are not recommendations, but options. Foster parents will be the final decision maker when selecting the child care site that best meets the child's and family needs.

Selection Guidance

- call child care providers to ask about openings;
- make appointments for interviews;
- be familiar with local child care licensing regulations;
- visit more than one child care provider and visit each more than once;
- at least one visit should be unannounced;
- schedule one visit near closing time and ask other parents for feedback;
- view all rooms in the family child care home or child care center and check the outdoor play area;
- trust your instincts - if you feel good about a child care provider and program, chances are your child will do well there;
- review the Broward County Child Care Licensing and Enforcement website at <http://205.166.161.20:8080/public/providersearch.aspx> for each program you are seriously considering.

Foster parents may choose any licensed child care program, licensed family child care home or public school program. The child care provider selected must have a signed School Readiness Provider Contract with the ELC. After you have determined the appropriate placement program and facility for your foster child, you will meet with a Family Central Eligibility Counselor to complete the enrollment paperwork. The Eligibility Counselor will issue a Child Care Certificate with a six month eligibility period. The Certificate will define start date for services and authorize payment to your selected child care provider. Family Central is not authorized to pay for any child care services provided **prior** to the date the Certificate is authorized by the Eligibility Counselor. Before the end of the six (6) month eligibility period, the foster parent must obtain another referral from ChildNet for the continuation of services.

LICENSING REGULATIONS

CHILD CARE CENTER REGULATIONS:

Staff/Child Ratios:

- ❖ Under Age 1 - One Staff Person per 4 Infants
- ❖ Age 1-2 Years - One Staff Person per 6 Toddlers
- ❖ Age 2-3 Years - One Staff Person per 11 Children
- ❖ Age 3-4 Years - One Staff Person per 15 Children
- ❖ Age 4-5 Years - One Staff Person per 20 Children
- ❖ Age 5 and Up - One Staff Person per 25 Children

FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME REGULATIONS:

Caregiver/Child Ratios:

- a. A maximum of four (4) children birth to 12 months of age, or
- b. A maximum of three (3) children from birth to 12 months of age and other children for a maximum total of six (6) children, or
- c. A maximum of six (6) preschool children if all are older than 12 months of age, or
- d. A maximum of ten (10) children if no more than five (5) are preschool age and of those five, no more than two are under 12 months of age.
- e. In large family child care homes, a maximum of twelve (12) children with no more than four (4) under 24 months of age and at least two staff present in the home.
(A family child care home provider caring for the children of just one (1) family is exempt from licensing.)



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Broward County offers several types of community-based early learning programs administered by both for profit and not-for-profit early childhood education providers. These include child care centers, family child care homes, developmental pre-schools, and public schools.

- Child Care Center: Care and educational activities offered to a group of children in a licensed, non-residential setting accommodating more than five children.
- Family Child Care Home: Care and educational activities offered to a group of five children or less in the home of a person who provides the care and is licensed.
- School-Age Child Care: These are programs for children ages 5 through 12 includes before and after school time; some offer school holiday programs or non-school hours.
- Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK): A high quality program with an early literacy focus.
- Developmental Preschools: Programs that specialize in serving infants and toddlers with developmental disabilities and other special needs; some provide inclusionary classrooms.

Broward is one of six Florida counties that chose to designate a local entity (Broward County Child Care Licensing and Enforcement) to regulate the licensing of child care arrangements, based on state statute. Child care standards addressed by statute include: personnel requirements (credentials, training), staff-to-child ratios, capacity requirements, physical environment (sanitation and safety), health-related requirements, food and nutrition, record keeping and transportation safety.

Eligibility

Although there are far more families in search of affordable child care than there are state or federal “school readiness funds” for low-income families, placements for children in foster care are prioritized. Currently, all children in foster care are eligible for financial assistance to attend early care and education programs.

If foster parent(s) need child care services due to employment or wish to support a child’s school readiness, be sure to advise the assigned Child Advocate so that she/he can initiate the referral process through ChildNet. The child care referral and all supporting documentation must be submitted by the Child Advocate prior to a foster parent contacting Family Central for enrollment. All children in the foster care system are encouraged to participate in early learning experiences on a full time basis.

Since child care services do not automatically transfer from one foster parent to another, if a child receiving child care services moves to a new foster home or living arrangement, the foster parent must notify Family Central of the placement change by calling (954) 724-1000.

Fees

Children in foster care, for whom their Child Advocate has made a referral to Family Central, have most, if not all, of their early care and education costs paid. Some centers, however, charge a higher rate than the ELC’s maximum allowable fee. For example, Gold Seal centers may charge the foster parent an additional surcharge or rate differential. ELC financial assistance funds are restricted only to actual child care services and do not cover transportation, registration, field trips, meals, or late pick up charges. It is always important that you receive a receipt for these payments made to the child care and/or aftercare provider.

Food Program

Family Central is contracted with the Florida Department of Health as a participant with the USDA Child Care Food Program to sponsor licensed family child care homes and child care centers in Broward. The goal of this valuable program is to ensure that nutritious meals and snacks are served and that good eating habits are taught in child care settings. Foster parents will need to complete and sign the Free and Reduced-Price Meal Application so that their foster child is able to benefit from this program.

Providers

The foster parent(s) listed on the referral from ChildNet is responsible for choosing the child care provider that best suits the child's and family's needs.

A Child Care Certificate is issued for a single child care provider. While foster families may request to change child care providers, that change must receive prior authorization from a Family Central Eligibility Counselor. Transferring a child without authorization will make you financially responsible for the child care payment until a new Child Care Certificate is issued.

Remember, though, it is important that children in foster care have the advantage of consistent, stable and planned transitions. In other words, transferring between child care providers *should only occur* when it is in the best interest of the child, or when there is a very significant reason to change caregiver.

Parental Responsibilities

Respond to calls from the **Child Care Resource and Referral Counselor** as soon as possible. For fastest service, return the call to the Counselor who first contacts you. The direct phone number is **954-724-4609**. Please identify yourself as a foster parent.

- Immunizations: Within 15 days of approval, an immunization record indicating the date of birth, signed by a public health officer or a licensed practicing physician, and a copy of current physical exam must be submitted to the child care provider. In addition, it is helpful if a copy of the child's birth verification record is provided to Family Central Counselor.
- "Sign-in / sign out" process: Child care providers are required to maintain a daily record of children's attendance. The foster parent or their authorized designee must sign this attendance log daily, both when arriving and when departing with the child. This is important to ensuring the provider is accurately compensated; however, do not agree to sign in advance. You should be signing in/out on a daily basis.
- Communication: Immediately contact the Eligibility Counselor if a child's foster care placement or eligibility status changes (i.e. adoption or reunification), or if child care is no longer needed. Please also promptly report changes in your contact information (home or office phone number or address).
- Redetermination of child care eligibility: A redetermination of eligibility for "at risk" children is required by law to occur at six month intervals. Be mindful of the expiration date and notify the assigned Child Net Advocate three – four weeks in advance that a

new referral will be needed. At redetermination, the Family Central Eligibility Counselor will contact you to review and update your file information.

Your cooperation and prompt response at that time is also important to ensure that the child's enrollment in child care continues.

- It is inevitable that working parents with a young child will sooner or later have to cope with their child being ill. Parents need to develop a plan that allows them to manage the difficult problem of caring for their sick child.

How sick is too sick for child care?

- Child care centers and family child care homes are not allowed to care for children suspected of having communicable diseases such as: chicken pox, measles or strep throat.
- Children exhibiting symptoms of illness such as undiagnosed rashes, sore throat, vomiting, or diarrhea also should not be in care.
- When enrolling your child in care, discuss the caregiver's sick child care policies.

Child Care Funding Ends If:

- the child leaves foster care through reunification, adoption, or other legal arrangement;
- the child no longer needs child care services;
- the child welfare agency, ChildNet, terminates the child's case;
- the child care provider loses contact with you or the child;
- either your family or child relocates outside the service area;
- the child is too frequently absent from child care;
- the eligibility re-determination and new referral are delinquent;
- there is a reduction in funding for child care services;
- information provided to the Eligibility Counselor is not accurate, complete or truthful.

Dispute Resolution and Right of Appeal

- Concerns About Your Child Care Provider:

If you have a concern specific to your child's needs, it is always best to first discuss that concern directly with the child care program's director.

If this discussion does not adequately resolve your concerns, or should a new issue present, then it is appropriate to contact the responsible regulatory agency. For example:

- Licensing requirements (staff ratios, capacity, medication issues) ...
Broward County Child Care Licensing and Enforcement – (954) 357-4800
- Harsh or abusive discipline / treatment or lack of supervision; hurting or neglecting your child or another child ...



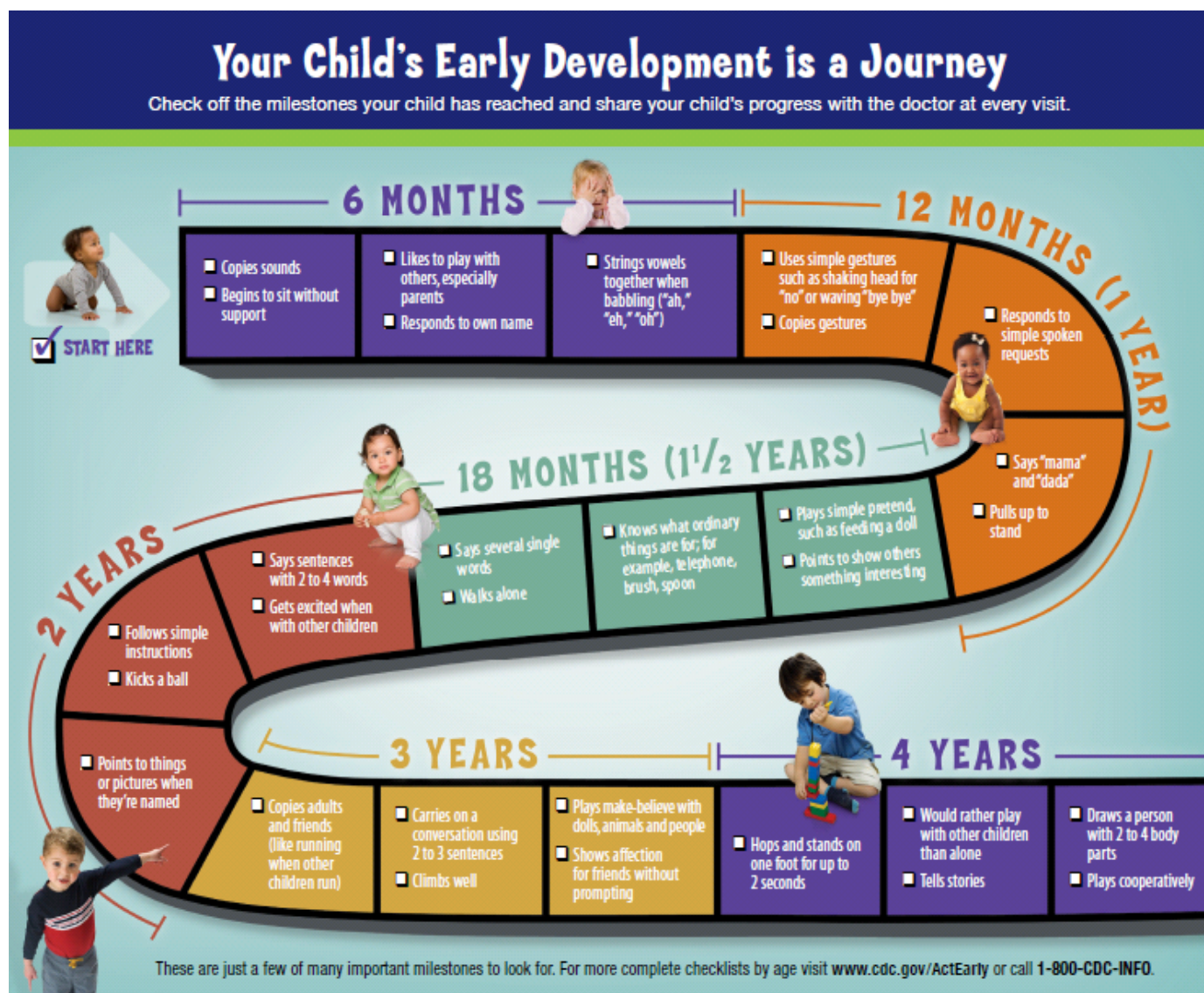
Dept. of Children and Families Abuse Hotline
Your name will be kept confidential
Toll free 1-800-962-2873.

Family Central, Inc. is responsible for addressing all grievances related to eligibility decisions. If you have been negatively affected by a decision rendered by Family Central, there are several levels of supervisory review available to you. If this procedure fails to resolve your concerns, you may formally request an Early Learning Coalition Hearing within ten days of the Family Central Review.

MONITORING DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

Child development refers to how a child becomes able to do more complex things as they get older. *Developmental milestones* are a set of functional skills or age-specific tasks that most children can do at a certain age range. Educators, pediatricians and other pediatric professionals use milestones as a broad overview of how a child is developing. Each milestone has an age level, though the actual age when a typically developing child reaches that milestone can vary quite a bit.

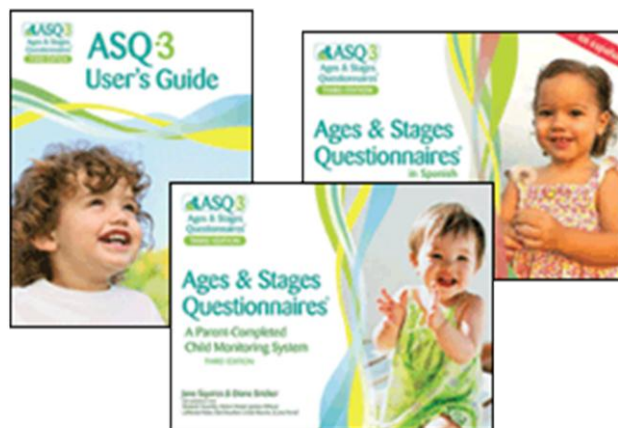
Every child is unique; however, children who have experienced trauma, abuse or neglect are at increased risk for developmental problems. It is extremely important that children in the child welfare system are identified early and have the opportunity for appropriate intervention services. Addressing developmental challenges during their early years will better prepare them to reach their optimal potential and to be successful in their foster placement and at school.



Developmental Screening

Screening involves a series of questions and observations that provide insight into a child's ability to perform certain age-appropriate tasks. Using developmental milestones as a guide can help identify children who may be at risk for developmental delay. The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) is a screening tool commonly used by local child caring organizations. It is a brief checklist of milestones used to assess whether children are on track developmentally.

The ASQ provides information on a child's abilities in five developmental domains: communication; gross and fine motor, problem solving, and personal / social skills.



Family Central Screenings

The ASQ screening is completed at the time of child care enrollment for children in the foster care system. It is then repeated annually the month of the child's birthday for as long as the child receives school readiness financial assistance.

- When a foster parent completes the ASQ at the time of enrollment, a Developmental Specialist is available at Family Central. The results will be reviewed immediately with you.
- The child's teacher completes the ASQ tools for children receiving an annual screening. The ASQ is then returned to a Family Central Child Development Specialist to analyze the results.
- Foster parents are informed when the child is due for the screening and will be contacted for input and will receive the screening results from the teacher.

Follow-up

- If the child is developmentally on target, no further action is taken.
- If the child is assessed as *borderline* in one or two developmental domains, the foster parent and teacher will be provided learning activities to use with the child to promote improvement.
- If the screener reveals developmental concerns, a Level II screening using the Brigance will be completed to validate the original results. If concerns are again indicated, the Child Advocate and the foster parent will be advised that a more comprehensive, multi-disciplinary evaluation is indicated. A referral to Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource Systems (FDLRS), Child Find will be made.

A Foster Parent's School Readiness Journey

1. The ChildNet Child Advocate submits a child care referral to Family Central.

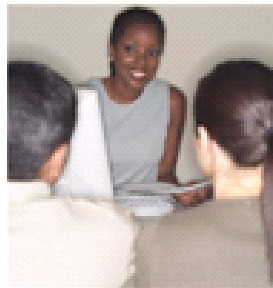


2. Upon receipt of the referral, a Child Care Resource and Referral Counselor contacts the foster parent to assist in the selection of specific child care provider options and discuss the importance of choosing quality child care.

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3. During this phone conference, an appointment is scheduled at Family Central with an Eligibility Counselor.



4. The foster parent meets with the Eligibility Counselor, identifies the child care option selected, and completes the required paperwork. The foster parent is given a "provider authorization" approving payment to the center.



5. After the appointment with the Eligibility Counselor, the foster parent meets with a Child Development Specialist.



6. The Child Development Specialist assists the foster parent in completing a developmental screening, reviews the results, and provides needed resources.



early steps

Ages 0-3



Ages 3-5

7. If the screening results show a need for follow-up, a referral is made to the Children's Diagnostic & Treatment Center /Early Steps (ages 0-3) or FDARS/Child Find (ages 3-5) for further evaluation.



The Voluntary Pre-kindergarten program is designed to prepare Florida's children for kindergarten and to develop the skills they need to become good readers and successful students. It includes standards for literacy skills, strict accountability, appropriate curricula, substantial instruction periods, manageable class sizes and qualified instructors. Parents have the option of enrolling children in a school-year program consisting of 540 instructional hours **or** a summer program consisting of 300 instructional hours. The Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc. administers the Voluntary Pre-kindergarten program locally, including: registering child care providers and providing applications and information to parents.

Eligibility

The Voluntary PreKindergarten Program (VPK) is available for children living in Florida who turn four (4) years of age on or before September 1st. A child is eligible either for the 540 hour school year program or the 300 hour summer program.

Fees

VPK class services **are free**; there are no fees for registration, supplies, food, field trips, or any other services that are offered during VPK program hours. If the child remains beyond the class time, arrangements must be made with the provider. There are an unlimited number of Certificates into a VPK program.

Locations

VPK programs are offered by local early childhood education providers, family child care homes, and public schools. Parents may choose which program is best suited for their child. For more information regarding VPK programs, contact the VPK Hotline at 1-866-968-4875 or contact a Family Central Child Care Resource and Referral Counselor at 954-724-4609.

Each VPK provider sets the hours it will operate. For example, a school year program may offer 3 or more hours per day, while a summer program may offer 6 – 8 hours per day. You may refer to the VPK Provider Profile Listing online for approved schools at <http://www.elcbroward.org/vpk.aspx>.

Contact each school to learn the start and end dates and hours of the VPK program.

Registration

Foster parents must go online to www.familycentral.org/vpkparentappointmentsbc to review the sites and schedule for appointments to register a child for VPK. The parent must complete an application and bring proof of residency to the appointment along with a copy of the child's proof of birth date.



When you complete the application process, you will receive a Certificate of Eligibility and a list Broward County VPK providers. You will need to submit the Certificate of Eligibility to the early care and education provider you choose, prior to your child attending the program.

EARLY HEAD START AND HEAD START PROGRAMS

Head Start is a national, federally funded program of educational and social services for low income preschool children and their families. The Broward County Public Schools **Head Start** and **Early Head Start Programs** provide services designed to: support families in nurturing the development of their children; enhance children's capacities to achieve their individual goals and aspirations; and improve the quality of life within the communities they live.

Children receiving Head Start services benefit from learning environments that offer a variety of age appropriate and increasingly complex experiences. The curriculum is designed to help them develop socially, cognitively, physically, and emotionally and to reflect each child's individual level of development, interests, temperament, language and cultural background. Head Start is a proponent of inclusion programming, which brings children with disabilities into classes with typically developing children so that all children learn together.

Nutritious breakfasts, lunches and snacks are included. Head Start students also receive a comprehensive array of health promotion services that include free dental, vision, hearing, mental health, and nutrition screenings. Follow-up referral services are available when needed.

Early Head Start

The Early Head Start Program offers two tracts: center or home based. Infants and toddlers in the centers are offered a variety of classroom learning experiences that foster language acquisition, physical mobility and social-emotional development. The center-based programs are: Bethune Elementary in Hollywood, The Charles Drew Family Resource Center in Pompano and Peter's Elementary in Plantation. On-site support staff consists of one teacher specialist, one social worker, one nurse, teacher assistants and one parent educators.

The home-based program provides parent educators who visit families weekly, partnering with parents in implementing the Parents as Teachers, Born to Learn curriculum. These families also have the opportunity to visit the centers on a bi-monthly basis for socialization opportunities.

Head Start

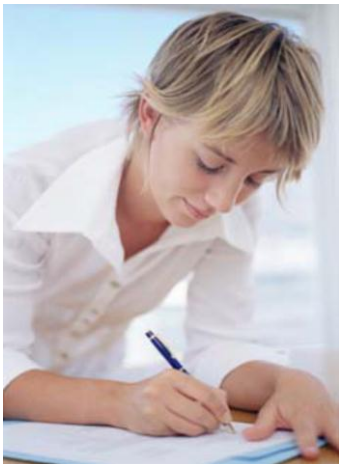
Head Start offers free, comprehensive services to economically disadvantaged, three and four year olds and their families, including foster parents. Head Start's multi-ethnic classes are held at over 60 elementary school sites. Classes follow the 180-day school calendar and the program's hours of operation adhere to each elementary school's hours. After school care is available at most of the elementary school locations where Head Start is offered.

Each Head Start classroom of up to 20 children is staffed by an early childhood, bachelor's level certified teacher and a teacher assistant with an associate's degree or CDA. On-site support services, training, and technical assistance are provided by multi-disciplinary teams. Among the program components are:

- Research-based curriculum
- State certified teachers
- Early literacy focus
- Ongoing monitoring & assessment
- Developmental screenings
- Field trips
- Social services
- Parent involvement

Eligibility

- children birth - 2 years old (Early Head Start)
- children 3 or 4 years old by September 1st (Head Start)
- children in foster care and those considered homeless under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act are prioritized for services
- children with disabilities, who meet all other requirements, are welcomed to apply



Application

Applications for Head Start/Early Head Start are accepted for the following school year during a specific enrollment period in the preceding late winter/early spring. A schedule of application times and locations is provided by the Broward County Schools, Pre K-2 Department. All applications are processed after May 1st; eligibility is determined based on need, not on the date the application is received. Applications must be completed by the parent/guardian; the following documents are required:

- proof of age (example: child's original birth certificate)
- child's Medicaid card, if eligible
- proof of guardianship, if applicable; guardian's proof of residency
- the child's financial subsidy information will be collected

Parental Responsibilities

- **Attendance:** Head Start Performance Standards require that attendance be closely monitored.
- **Home Visits:** Parent educators are required to schedule a home visit with parents to provide program information and establish goals that will assist families in obtaining and benefiting from services. Head Start Performance Standards require two home visits be made by the classroom teacher and that parent(s) attend two parent conferences during the year a child participates in the program.
- **Parent Meetings:** During the course of the year, Head Start staff will schedule four parent meetings during the school year in response to surveys completed by parents that indicate topics in which they have special interest. These may include, but are not limited to: health, safety, nutrition, education, family issues and community resources.
- **Transportation:** Transportation services are not provided to Head Start/Early Head Start students.

For more information on Head Start or Early Head Start, please call 754-321-1961.



SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SUPPORT

Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources Systems (FDLRS)Child Find Broward County Public Schools

Program Description

FDLRS Child Find assists parents and schools in the early identification of children who are at risk of developing special or unique needs and who are not being served in a public school. The target is birth through 21 years with primary emphasis on children birth to 5 years of age. In Broward County, Child Find is the entry point for children who have or are suspected of having a disability. In Florida, services for children birth to their third birthday (known as Part C) are provided through Early Steps. For children three to 21 years of age, Special Education and Support Services (known as Part B) are provided through the Broward County Public Schools.

Referrals

Referrals for children in the foster care placements should be completed by the ChildNet Child Advocate. If, as a foster parent, you have concerns regarding the development of a child in your care, contact the ChildNet Child Advocate to ensure that a referral is made.

Formal evaluation requires parental consent. For children whose placement is with parents, relatives or non-relatives, the custodian may provide this written consent. Federal education laws require that the child's birth/adoptive parent provide consent, (provided their location is known and their parental rights are intact and their whereabouts known) for children residing in licensed out-of-home care. If the child's parent is not available to provide this consent, a foster parent should defer to the Child Advocate for obtaining consent.

Screenings and Evaluation

Children ages 3 – 5 years who have or are suspected of having a disability and are receiving early care and education services, are referred for Part B services through Broward County Public Schools' Child Find Program.

Free screenings are coordinated with the preschool assessment teams and address the areas of speech, language, motor, development, learning, vision and hearing. Screening locations are available throughout the county.

The purpose of the screening is to determine the need for further evaluation. The evaluation may indicate the need for special education or related services. If eligible for services, the Broward County Public Schools has a number of programs for preschoolers with special needs:

- Part-time Speech and Language
- Specialized Preschool
- Intensive Preschool
- Integrated Preschool Program
- Specialized Auditory and Oral Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing



Eligibility

Eligibility for Part B services include:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing
- Developmental Delay
- Dual-Sensory Impairments
- Emotional / Behavioral Disabilities
- Established Conditions, such as Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy (for children under 3)
- Homebound or Hospitalized
- Intellectual Disabilities
- Physically Impaired with Orthopedic Impairment
- Physically Impaired Other Health Impairment
- Physically Impaired with Traumatic Brain Injury
- Specific Learning Disabilities
- Speech and Language Impairments
- Visual Impairment

Fees

All services are part of the public school system and are free of charge.

Locations

Preschool Special Educational Support Programs are located in over 90 Broward County Public Schools locations and community agencies. The Broward County Public Schools' policy is to educate students in a program that will meet their Individualized Education Plan needs at the location closest to their home.

When a child is determined to be eligible for services, an IEP will be developed identifying the goals, services, accommodations, modifications and related services necessary to enable the child to access their education and achieve the goals identified. The IEP must be updated annually; however, it may be updated sooner as needed. Although foster parents may not be the provider of parental consent, they have valuable information to contribute to the process and should attend the IEP meetings.

Transportation

Broward County Public Schools will provide transportation to students receiving services with accommodations as needed according to the child's IEP.



For more information on Child Find, contact (754)-321-2204.

POSITIVE EARLY EXPERIENCES ARE ESSENTIAL TO HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN



Young children in Child Protective Services are recognized to be at increased risk for developmental problems. For this reason, there is an urgent need to identify, as early as possible, those infants and toddlers who will most benefit from interventions provided when the developing brain is most capable of change.



The first three years of a child's life are a period of rapid growth and development. By addressing developmental delays during these early years, infants and toddlers are better prepared to reach their full potential and to be successful at home and school.



Early Steps is Florida's Part C system of early intervention services for young children who are not reaching age-appropriate developmental milestones. Services for children in foster care will be funded through Medicaid and provided at no out-of-pocket expense to families. In Broward, Early Steps is administered by the Children's Diagnostic & Treatment Center (CDTC).



Children under 36 months whose caregivers have concerns about their development should be referred right away to Early Steps. Foster parents need to inform the Child Advocate of these concerns and request that a referral be made. The ChildNet Child Advocates have been trained on the legal procedures required to initiate the referral. When the case is opened, an Early Steps Service Coordinator will be assigned to assist caregivers throughout their Early Steps "journey."

Children will be scheduled for a multi-disciplinary eligibility evaluation. If they are found to have a significant delay in one or more of the following areas (*based upon Florida's eligibility guidelines*), an Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) will be developed to address the child's needs and the family's concerns and goals.

➤ Cognition ➤ Social / Emotional ➤ Physical (*gross / fine motor, vision, hearing*) ➤ Communication ➤ Adaptive / Self help
Children diagnosed by a physician with an established medical condition that is likely to result in a developmental delay are automatically eligible for services (*such as Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and Autism*).

The Early Steps Approach: An Overview for Caregivers - The relationships children have with their parents/caregivers are the foundation of the Early Steps approach to promoting child development. Early Steps uses education and coaching as an intervention method, recognizing that:

- Daily interactions between children and their caregivers have the greatest impact on child development.
- Children learn best during the activities that they experience every day, where they live and play.
- This also allows the children many more opportunities to practice important developmental skills.

What is my role as a caregiver? As a parent / caregiver, you are expected to:

- Actively participate during coaching sessions by asking questions and practicing;
- Use the strategies between sessions that were suggested by your coach.
- Tell your coach about progress made since the last session / discuss any new problems;

How long will Early Steps services be provided? Children leave the Early Steps program once they have met their developmental goals and no longer need early intervention services. Children who continue to need developmental services after age 3 will transition to services provided through the Broward County Public Schools or other community organizations. As part of transition planning, Early Steps will facilitate the referral of children receiving protective services to the Broward County Public Schools to be considered for preschool special education eligibility.

High quality early intervention programs for vulnerable infants and toddlers can reduce the incidence of future problems in their learning, behavior and health status.

FAMILY CENTRAL offers Ages & Stages (ASQ) screenings. If developmental concerns are identified, families are informed and children are referred through Child Find.

Broward County Your Journey through Early Steps



1. REFERRAL - Early Steps receives referrals through the Child Find office of the Broward School System, neonatal intensive care units, or other Part C programs. Broward Early Steps opens a case record and confirms receipt of a referral.



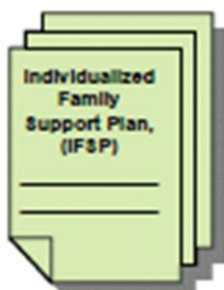
Identifies and /or responds to reports of children having developmental problems and to Court Orders for Part C evaluations, then direct refers these cases to Broward Early Steps.



2. SERVICE COORDINATOR - Broward Early Steps will assign a Service Coordinator to work with the caregiver. The Child Advocate and the caregiver will be notified of the Service Coordinator's name and phone number, along with other important program information.



3. FIRST CONTACT - The Service Coordinator will telephone the caregiver to discuss the reported concerns and answer questions.



IF ELIGIBLE



5. TEAM EVALUATION - A comprehensive multi-disciplinary evaluation will determine if the child's developmental delay(s) meet state eligibility standards for Early Steps services.



4. NEEDS ASSESSMENT - A home visit will typically be scheduled to meet the child and caregiver. Updated information will be obtained and a developmental screening may be completed. The Service Coordinator will explain and schedule the eligibility evaluation appointment, which will be conducted at the Children's Diagnostic & Treatment Center.



6. SERVICES - If found eligible, the child's identified service goals and recommended services will be authorized on an IFSP, and an Early Steps enrolled service provider will be identified. This provider will help families to learn and to implement early intervention strategies within the child's typical daily routines.

IF INELIGIBLE



INFORMATION & REFERRAL

You will receive developmental information, be encouraged to support and monitor your child's development, and be directed to other appropriate community services.



7. ONGOING SUPPORT & DIRECTION - Your Service Coordinator will check with you regularly and is available to respond to concerns and questions you may have. Your Service Coordinator will also schedule IFSP updates when needed, and at least every six months.



8. TRANSITION PLANNING - By 30 months of age, you, your Service Coordinator and IFSP Team will begin planning the child's transition from the Early Steps Program to the Broward School System, Part B Services, or other community resources.



9. TRANSITION - Early Steps services will end when goals are met / or no later than the child's third birthday.

CONTRIBUTORS

This Handbook is a product of the collaboration of many dedicated professionals from the fields of child welfare, early childhood education, child development and social services. We thank the following partner agencies for contributing:

Organization	Address	Telephone #	Web Site Links
Broward County Government	2995 N. Dixie Hwy. Fort Lauderdale, FL 33334	954-357-4800	http://www.broward.org/HumanServices/CommunityPartnerships/ChildcareLicensingEnforcement/Pages/Default.aspx
Broward County Public Schools	600 SE Third Ave Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301	754-321-0000	www.broward.k12.fl.us/studentsupport/ese/index
ChildNet, Inc.	313 N. State Rd. 7 Plantation, F 33317	954-414-6000	www.childnet.us
Children's Diagnostic & Treatment Center, Inc.	1401 S Federal Highway Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316	954-728-8080	www.childrensdiagnostic.org
Children's Services Council of Broward	6600 W. Commercial Blvd., Lauderhill, FL 33319	954-377-1000	www.cscbroward.org
Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc	6301 NW 5 th Way, Suite 3400 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309	954-377-2185	www.elcbroward.org
Family Central, Inc.	840 SW 81st Ave. North Lauderdale, FL 33068	954-724-4609	http://www.familycentral.org/ChildCareParentsBC
Head Start or Early Head Start	600 SE Third Ave. Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301	754-321-1961 Head Start 754-321-1959 Early Head Start	www.broward.k12.fl.us/childdevelopment/headstart

Dept. of Children and Families Abuse Hotline
Your name will be kept confidential
Toll free 1-800-962-2873.