



# Sample Memorandum of Understanding Between Head Start and Early Head Start and Domestic Violence Programs

Head Start and Early Head Start programs can use this resource to develop and revise memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreements with community partners.

## Why Partner With Domestic Violence Programs?

Many families participating in Head Start and Early Head Start programs are affected by domestic violence. Research has shown that experiences of violence and other traumatic events can cause social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties in young children (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.). These experiences can impede learning for children. Head Start and Early Head Start program staff may see early signs of young children’s stress or trauma through children’s behavior and through their family engagement work (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.).

Relationships with caring and supportive adults act as a protective factor for family members and children who have seen or experienced domestic violence. Head Start and Early Head Start program staff are well positioned to implement universal violence prevention strategies. Staff can support children during challenging times and provide information and referrals to family members.

Head Start and Early Head Start and domestic violence programs can work as a team to prevent violence and help reduce the risk of families experiencing further violence. Together they can create opportunities for healing. Staff do not have to address domestic violence alone.

Domestic violence program staff have specialized training in crisis counseling and safety planning. They also have access to resources, such as shelter, legal services, housing, and financial and health advocacy. Domestic violence program staff can connect families to culturally and linguistically responsive services.

Community partnerships also can help facilitate “warm referrals” from the Head Start or Early Head Start program to the domestic violence program. These kinds of personal connections between programs may help family members feel safer and more confident in accessing support. In some communities, domestic violence programs are able to provide services at the Head Start or Early Head Start program to make services easier and safer for families to access.

Collaboration between Head Start and Early Head Start and domestic violence programs benefits the community by increasing the number of agencies that offer trauma-informed care to families. Collaboration can lead to other benefits, including:

- Access to safe and confidential resources for Head Start and Early Head Start families currently experiencing domestic violence
- Numbers of Head Start and Early Head Start staff who are knowledgeable about domestic violence and community-based resources (e.g., shelter, home visitation, legal options for survivors)
- Numbers of Head Start and Early Head Start staff who understand the impact of domestic violence on children and who have the skills to support children’s healing and resiliency
- Numbers of domestic violence staff who understand the services offered by Head Start and Early Head Start
- Numbers of domestic violence staff who understand the role of early childhood programs in supporting children’s learning and development and family well-being

## **Creating or Revising a Memorandum of Understanding**

Head Start and Early Head Start and domestic violence programs can use a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish and sustain partnerships. An MOU is a nonlegally binding agreement between two organizations that want to enter into a partnership. The MOU defines roles, responsibilities, and desired outcomes.

Learn about the components of an MOU and review a sample template. You can adapt this template to meet the needs of your families and community, and to make the most of the resources you have.

## **Components of a Memorandum of Understanding**

### ***Partnering Organizations and Purpose***

An MOU lists the formal names of the programs or organizations that are agreeing to work together. It describes the purpose of the partnership. The purpose is the partners’ understanding of the general nature of the MOU agreement (understanding).

### ***Activities and Responsibilities***

This section describes the activities and responsibilities that the partnering organizations agree to carry out.

### ***Signatures***

At the end of the MOU are the names and signatures of the staff members from each partnering organization that will serve as the designated agents for the agreement. This section shows the date the agreement was signed.

## Sample Memorandum of Understanding

The sample MOU below is between a Head Start program and a domestic violence agency. You can use this sample as a template and adapt or modify it for your purposes. Any MOU that you create can be more limited or more expansive in scope. The scope depends upon the purpose of the agreement you would like to enter into and the goals you share with your partnering organization(s).

### Memorandum of Understanding Agreement (Example)

#### ***Partnering Organizations and Purpose***

The [insert name of Head Start Program] and [insert name of Domestic Violence program] will work in partnership to support family safety and well being, effective family and community engagement, and children's learning and development. Together they will work to enhance the capacity of [insert name of Head Start Program] to prevent and address domestic violence and to enhance the capacity of [insert name of Domestic Violence program] to provide services to young children and their families by agreeing to do the following:

#### ***Activities and Responsibilities***

##### **Create and Support a Leadership Team**

- Guide and maintain the partnership by engaging management team members of the partners and representatives of other community organizations that are culturally and linguistically responsive to families.
- Develop policies and procedures for [insert name of Head Start program] and [insert name of Domestic Violence program] to enhance collaboration and communication. Develop a protocol for addressing critical incidents and best practices for prevention and intervention with all family members. Review the protocol annually and update it as needed.
- Develop best practices for [insert name of Domestic Violence program] to support children's learning, school readiness, and healthy development.
- Share information about related upcoming events/training, new resources, and collaboration on providing support to families experiencing violence.
- Evaluate the partnership and debrief critical incidents, plan future awareness, training and other activities, and discuss other related issues.

##### **Provide Program Staff Training and Support**

- Cross training: [Insert name of Domestic Violence program] will train on the basics of domestic violence, healthy relationships, appropriate response to disclosures, vicarious trauma, self-care, and other related topics. [Insert name of Head Start program] will train on child development, family engagement, and the services they offer to families.
- [Insert name of Domestic Violence program] will provide [insert name of Head Start program] with referral information that outlines the services provided in the local community.

- [Insert name of Head Start program] will provide domestic violence program with program brochures, posters, and other educational materials to be made available to all families.

**Ensure Safety and Confidentiality**

- [Insert name of Head Start program] and [insert name of Domestic Violence program] will work together to discuss safety considerations and best practices related to mandatory reporting of child abuse cases involving domestic violence.
- All [insert name of Head Start program] staff supporting families that reside at the domestic violence program shelter will complete a confidentiality agreement to ensure that the location of the shelter remains confidential.
- All [insert name of Head Start program] staff are eligible for services at [insert name of Domestic Violence program]. Their participation is confidential.

**Create Referral Processes**

- [Insert name of Head Start program] and [insert name of Domestic Violence program] will develop processes to provide universal education on domestic violence with all families, and make warm referrals to domestic violence program when domestic violence is disclosed, or to other appropriate culturally and linguistically responsive services.
- Staff members at both agencies will be identified as primary contacts to request and receive referrals from [insert name of Head Start program].
- If a case of domestic violence is identified and the family requests advocacy services, [insert name of Domestic Violence program] will provide services in person at [insert name of Head Start program] whenever possible.
- If the family members consent, [insert name of Domestic Violence program] will provide to [insert name of Head Start program] basic information about services provided to the family for the purposes of tracking effectiveness of partnership and supportive services offered to family. Domestic violence services will not be denied to families if they do not consent to the release of this information.

**Signatures**

We, the undersigned, approve and agree to the terms and conditions as outlined in this Memorandum of Understanding.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Role  
 Program/Organization

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Role  
 Program/Organization

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

## Reference

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (n.d.). Effects. Retrieved from <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/intimate-partner-violence/effects>

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