EARLY CHILDHOOD SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR FAMILY SHELTERS

A guide to support the safe and healthy development of young children in shelter settings

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Introduction

Family shelters provide essential services to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers during a difficult time in their lives. As you work to connect families to permanent housing, you can ensure that your shelter environment assists the physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual development of children ages 0-5 to support these children through their experience of homelessness. Creating this safe, developmentally appropriate environment will assure that the infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in your shelter have the best possible start to a bright future, as they exit homelessness into permanent housing.

The *Early Childhood Self-Assessment Tool for Family Shelters* is specifically designed to help shelter staff members create shelter environments that are safe and developmentally appropriate for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. In this tool, you will find recommendations and information on how your shelter environment, programming, policies, and staff can support early childhood safety and development. Similar tools have been developed and implemented with much success in child care, early learning, and early childhood development settings.

This tool is just one of several resources that the Administration on Children and Families (ACF) created to support the healthy and safe development of children experiencing homelessness.

- Birth to Five: Watch me Thrive!, a coordinated federal effort to encourage healthy child development, universal developmental and behavioral screening for children, and support for the families and providers who care for them
- Developmental Screening Guide for shelter and housing providers
- Early Childhood and Family Homelessness Resource List

Additional Concerns: Child Abuse & Domestic Violence

We recognize that in the course of working with young children, providers may discover situations of concern within the family. If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, contact your local Child Protective Service (CPS) or law enforcement agency so professionals can assess the situation. Many states have a toll-free number to call to report suspected child abuse or neglect. To find out where to call, consult the Child Welfare Information Gateway.

If you find that a child is currently part of a family that is experiencing domestic violence, find a safe time and place to speak to the parent. Let her or him know that there is help available by calling **1-800-799-7233**. The National Domestic Violence Hotline provides crisis intervention and can help the parent plan for safety and next steps.

For additional resources, check out Childhelp®, a national organization that provides crisis assistance and other counseling and referral services. Call **1-800-4-A-CHILD** (1-800-422-4453). The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with professional crisis counselors who have access to a database of 55,000 emergency, social service, and support resources. All calls are anonymous.

Why this tool is important

Approximately 672,000 children under the age of six will be homeless at some point during the year,[1] many of whom will spend substantial time in shelters. These children face a host of barriers that are linked to poor physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual development outcomes. [2] Supporting the healthy development of young children experiencing homelessness can reduce the prevalence of developmental and behavioral disorders that are associated with high costs and long-term consequences for the housing crisis, health, mental health, education, child welfare, and justice systems.[3] Shelters can be a positive force in the lives of children and mitigate the negative impact that homelessness can have on their development by creating an environment that is safe and developmentally appropriate.

Organization of this tool

This tool contains a section of recommendations for making shelter facilities safe and developmentally appropriate for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in five areas: Health & Safety, Wellness & Development, Workforce Standards & Training, Programming, and Food & Nutrition. Links to resources referenced in the tool are listed at the end of each section, and starting on page 20. Also accompanying these recommendations is an action plan form that can be found on page 18.

We understand that your shelter program is likely operating at capacity, with little extra time or financial resources. Therefore, this tool categorizes recommendations by the estimated amount of resources they will require.

- Recommendations that likely require few resources, i.e. those that can be done for little to no money or staff time, are marked with an asterisk and highlighted in white.
- Recommendations that likely require some resources, i.e. those that may need a small amount of money or staff time, are marked with two asterisks and highlighted in light blue.
- Recommendations that likely require substantial resources, i.e. those that may require shelters to apply for grant funding, are marked with three asterisks and highlighted in dark blue.

Low Resource Requirements*	Some Resource Requirements**	Substantial Resource Requirements***

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[1] Bassuk, Ellen L., Cristina Murphy, Natalie Thompson Coupe, Rachael R. Kenney, and Corey Anne Beach. America's Youngest Outcasts: 2010. National Center on Family Homelessness, Needham, MA. 2011.

[2] Bassuk, Ellen L., Cristina Murphy, Natalie Thompson Coupe, Rachael R. Kenney, and Corey Anne Beach. America's Youngest Outcasts: 2010. National Center on Family Homelessness, Needham, MA. 2011; Tumaini R. Coker, Marc N. Elliott, David E. Kanouse, Jo Anne Grunbaum, M. Janice Gilliland, Susan R. Tortolero, Paula Cuccaro, and Mark A. Schuster. "Prevalence, Characteristics, and Associated Health and Health Care of Family Homelessness among Fifth-Grade Students." *American Journal of Public Health* 99:8, 1446-1452. August 2009; Bassuk, E. L., Volk, K. T., & Olivet, J. "A framework for developing supports and services for families experiencing homelessness." *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal,* 3, 34-40. 2010.

[3] Johnson, K. and J. Rosenthal. (2009). Improving Care Coordination, Case Management, and Linkages to Service for Young Children: Opportunities for States. (Portland, ME: The National Academy for State Health Policy, April 2009). http://www.nashp.org/making-the-case#sthash.e4r0aYIK.dpuf; Reynolds, A. and J. Temple. (2008). "Cost-effective early childhood development programs from preschool to third grade." *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 4, 109–139.

How to use this tool

We recommend that shelter staff use this tool first to do an initial assessment of their facility, noting whether each recommendation has been accomplished, is improving, or needs action. Based on the results of the initial assessment, operators and/or staff then can use the included resources to identify strategies to best provide a safe and developmentally appropriate setting for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. These strategies can then be translated into an action plan.

We suggest that staff members use this tool to re-evaluate the shelter's progress at least once during the implementation process and once after the process's completion. Also, because of the complex and changing nature of each family's experience with homelessness, it may be helpful to consistently engage residents, especially parents with young children, throughout the process of improving the facility's policies and practices related to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

This tool is not intended to serve as comprehensive guide to programming in shelters or as a guide for ensuring the full education needs of young children. It is simply a mechanism to guide shelter staff as they begin the process to improve the safety and developmental appropriateness of their facility for young children.

Self-Assessment Tool

Section A: Health & Safety

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
A1: We meet all Emergency Solutions Grant health and safety standards*					
A2:We discuss emergency response plans (for natural disasters, lost children, active shooters, etc.) with residents and post them publicly*					
A3: We have sanitary diaper changing stations*					
A4: We practice and encourage frequent hand washing*					
A5: We prevent harmful exposure to blood and other dangerous bodily fluids*					
A6: We take precautions to limit the spread of contagious diseases among infants, toddlers, and preschoolers*					
A7: We encourage parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to immunize their children and keep track of these immunizations*					
A8: We maintain an appropriate temperature in the shelter and allow residents with young children to stay inside when needed and/or desired*					

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
A9: We have rules regarding visitation by non-residents to ensure the safety of residents*					
A10: We mandate that all residents, staff, volunteers, and other shelter guests sign in and out of the facility*					
A11: Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are under supervision by parents and/or staff/volunteers at all times, following staff/child ratio requirements*					
A12: We encourage and incorporate parent feedback regarding our facility's policies towards the safety and development of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers*					
A13: We follow safe sleep practices as outlined by the NIH to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and provide parents with this information**					
A14: We have safety proofed all rooms and common spaces for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers**					
A15: We have age appropriate first aid materials on hand (including EpiPens, Children's Benadryl and Tylenol, band aids, etc.)**					

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
A16: We provide age appropriate hygiene materials (i.e. baby soap, baby shampoo, sunscreen)**					
A17: We connect infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to primary care providers by posting information, providing transportation, etc.**					
A18: We have separate, private rooms for each family with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers**					
A19: We have child abuse safeguards throughout our facility (low walls, vision panels, and reflective security mirrors) and have written process and training for reporting child abuse***					

Resources Referenced in this Section

Shelter and housing standards – Code of Federal Regulations 24 C.F.R. §576.403
http://go.usa.gov/G66R

Diaper Changing Stations
http://cfoc.nrckids.org/StandardView/3.2.1.4

Hand Washing
www.cdc.gov/features/handwashing/

Prevent Exposure to Blood and other Bodily Fluids
http://go.usa.gov/GHsG

Immunization Schedules for Infants and Children
www.cdc.gov/vaccines

Safe Sleep Practices
http://go.usa.gov/G6F9

Section B: Wellness & Development

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
B1: We screen all infants, toddlers, and preschoolers for developmental delays, refer them to Part C and B of IDEA child find programs in each State if needed, and follow any existing special care plans*					
B2: We offer referrals to Part C and Part B of IDEA for evaluations to determine the need for IDEA services such as speech, physical therapy and special education. We offer referrals for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers (i.e. mental health, home visiting)*					
B3: We follow a schedule that allows infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to attend child care, Head Start, IDEA Part C early intervention or Part B preschool or other early care and learning programs*					
B4: We publically post enrollment materials for, refer families to, and encourage participation in Head Start, Early Head Start, IDEA Part C early intervention or Part B preschool, child care subsidy programs, preschool, and other early care and learning programs*					

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
B5: We have and maintain age and developmentally appropriate toys and learning materials (books, games, etc. that are cleaned, repaired, etc.)**					
B6: We have space available for women to breastfeed privately**					
B7: We have space available for parents to spend time with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers that is clean, well-maintained, and family friendly**					
B8: We have space available for parents to eat with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers**					
B9: We have indoor and outdoor play space available for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers that is safe, clean, and well-maintained**					

Resources Referenced in this Section

Development Screening for Housing & Homeless Service Providers
http://go.usa.gov/GFxh

Care Plan for Children with Special Health Needs
http://go.usa.gov/7qCm

Toys and Activities for Young Children
www.naeyc.org/ecp/resources/goodtoys

IDEA State Part C Coordinators and Referral Website
http://ectacenter.org/contact/ptccoord.asp

IDEA State Part B Coordinators and Referral Website
http://ectacenter.org/contact/619coord.asp

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Developmental Milestones
http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/

Section C: Workforce Standards & Training

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
C1: We train our staff on the effects of homelessness on the development of young children and on how they can support the healthy development of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers*					
C2: We train our staff to recognize and respond to adverse drug and allergic reactions*					
C3: We have procedures in place for collaborating with local early care and education programs (Head Start, child care, IDEA Part C early intervention and Part B preschool, etc.)*					
C4: We collaborate with the local McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Liaison and post contact information in the shelter*					
C6: We train our staff on recognizing domestic violence and the process for referring families to community-based services and hotlines**					
C7: We train our staff in trauma-informed care**					

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
C8: We have at least one staff who is trained in CPR/First Aid for adults, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers present at all times**					
C9: We run background checks on all of our staff to ensure they pass all child abuse clearances**					
C10: We have staff and/or consultants who can address the developmental, educational, and nutritional needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers and knows process for making referrals to IDEA Part C and Part B programs for infants, toddlers and young children with disabilities for early care and learning programs***					

Resources Referenced in this Section

State Coordinators for Homeless Education
center.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php

Domestic Violence Resource Network
http://go.usa.gov/GFTT

Trauma-Informed Care
www.familyhomelessness.org/media/90.pdf

IDEA State Part C Coordinators and Referral Website
http://ectacenter.org/contact/ptccoord.asp

IDEA State Part B Coordinators and Referral Website
http://ectacenter.org/contact/619coord.asp

Section D: Programming

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
D1: We encourage and support family connections to Head Start, Child Care, TANF, LIHEAP, public education, IDEA Program, SNAP, WIC, Summer Food Service Program, CHIP & Medicaid, etc.*					
D2: We connect families with home visiting services and provide space for home visits to occur in our shelter*					
D3: We have a clear process to receive feedback and/or file grievances relating to the shelter's policies and practices concerning infants, toddlers, and preschoolers*					
D4: All rules, policies, programming, and feedback processes regarding infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are posted publically in the shelter*					
D5: We have on-site early childhood enrichment programming for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers***					
D6: We offer (not require) classes on topics such as parenting, nutrition, financial literacy, etc. to support the parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers***					

Resources Referenced in this Section

Head Start Locator
acf.hhs.gov/ohs

Child Care State and Territory Contacts
go.usa.gov/GFPP

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
acf.hhs.gov/ofa/help

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
go.usa.gov/GFmA

Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program
ed.gov/programs/homeless

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
www.fns.usda.gov/snap

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children
www.fns.usda.gov/wic

Summer Food Service Program
www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp

CHIP & Medicaid
go.usa.gov/GFVh

Home Visiting
mchb.hrsa.gov/programs/homevisiting

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
http://idea.ed.gov/

Section E: Food & Nutrition

What have we done so far?	Accomplished	Improving	Needs Action	Notes	Next Steps
E1: We comply with local, state, and federal food safety standards*					
E2: We do not serve foods that are choking hazards to infants, toddlers, or preschoolers*					
E3: Our residents always have access to safe drinking water*					
E4: We follow CDC guidelines for storing human milk*					
E5: We warm bottles with warm tap water, NEVER the microwave and publically post this practice*					
E6: We identify and maintain records of food allergies and other special dietary needs of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers*					
E7: We take advantage of the Child and Adult Care Food Program**					
E8: We provide snacks and meals with attention to children's allergies and dietary restrictions**					
E9: We always have a supply of formula, baby food, and age-appropriate nutritious snacks available to parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers**					

Resources Referenced in this Section

Choking Hazards
go.usa.gov/GFG4

Storing Human Milk
go.usa.gov/GF7W

Child and Adult Care Food Program
www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp

Age Appropriate Nutrition
www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/age-appropriate-nutrition

Action Plan for Creating a Safe, Developmentally Appropriate Environment for Young Children
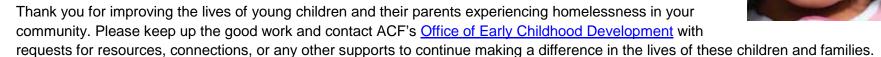
GOAL: _____

ACTION STEPS	TIMELINE	PERSON(S) INVOLVED	RESOURCES NEEDED

SIGNATURE OF SHELTER OPERATOR/STAFF:

Thank you for making a difference

Research indicates that the first five years of a child's life are critical to brain development, academic achievement, and outcomes later in life. The work you are doing to provide the infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who reside at your shelter with a safe and developmentally appropriate experience is vital to the trajectory of their lives.

In addition to implementing the above recommendations, you can continue to play an important, positive role in the lives of countless young children by passing this tool along to other shelters and publicizing the need for early childhood-specific practices in homeless services throughout your community. If you aren't already, it would be helpful to get involved in your community's Continuum of Care, which coordinates homeless service delivery and reach out to your Local Emergency Food & Shelter Program Board, which provides funding for temporary shelter and food services. Both are great places to advocate for young children experiencing homelessness.

Thank you for improving the lives of young children and their parents experiencing homelessness in your community. Please keep up the good work and contact ACF's Office of Early Childhood Development with requests for resources, connections, or any other supports to continue making a difference in the lives of these children and families.

Please visit ACF's website for a full list of ACF resources on early childhood homelessness.

Acknowledgement

Multiple departments and agencies collaboratively developed this resource to support the outreach efforts of the Early Childhood Sub-group of the Interagency Workgroup on Ending Family Homelessness. We would like to acknowledge those contributing to or reviewing this resource including:

- ACF Office of the Acting Assistant Secretary
- ACF Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development
- ACF Office of Head Start
- ACF Office of Child Care
- ACF Family & Youth Services Bureau, Family Violence Prevention & Services Program
- U.S. Department of Education (OESE and OSEP)

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- United States Interagency Council on Homelessness
- National Alliance to End Homelessness
- National Center for Homeless Education
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
- Ounce of Prevention Fund
- Bill Emerson Hunger Fellowship Program

We would also like to acknowledge the special contributions of Grace Whitney, PhD, MPA, Director of the CT Head Start State Collaboration Office. She provided background and research on the CT Head Start – Family Shelter Collaboration Project that was the basis for this resource.

List of resources referenced in this document

Self-Assessment Tool Section A: Health & Safety

Shelter and housing standards – Code of Federal Regulations
24 C.F.R. §576.403
http://go.usa.gov/G66R

Hand Washing
www.cdc.gov/features/handwashing/

Prevent Exposure to Blood and other Bodily Fluids
http://go.usa.gov/GHsG

Immunization Schedules for Infants and Children
www.cdc.gov/vaccines

Safe Sleep Practices
http://go.usa.gov/G6F9

Self-Assessment Tool Section B: Wellness & Development

Development Screening for Housing & Homeless Service Providers
http://go.usa.gov/GFxh

Care Plan for Children with Special Health Needs
http://go.usa.gov/7qCm

Toys and Activities for Young Children
www.naeyc.org/ecp/resources/goodtoys

Self-Assessment Tool Section C: Workforce Standards & Training

State Coordinators for Homeless Education
center.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php

Domestic Violence Resource Network
http://go.usa.gov/GFTT

Trauma-Informed Care
www.familyhomelessness.org/media/90.pdf

Self-Assessment Tool Section D: Programming

Head Start Locator
acf.hhs.gov/ohs

Child Care State and Territory Contacts
http://go.usa.gov/GFPP

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
acf.hhs.gov/ofa/help

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
http://go.usa.gov/GFmA

Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program
ed.gov/programs/homeless

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
www.fns.usda.gov/snap

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children
www.fns.usda.gov/wic

Summer Food Service Program
www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp

CHIP & Medicaid
http://go.usa.gov/GFVh

Home Visiting
mchb.hrsa.gov/programs/homevisiting

Self-Assessment Tool Section E: Food & Nutrition

Choking Hazards
go.usa.gov/GFG4

Storing Human Milk
go.usa.gov/GF7W

Child and Adult Care Food Program
www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp

Age Appropriate Nutrition
www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/age-appropriate-nutrition

Additional Resources

Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive
hhs.gov/watchmethrive

Early Childhood and Family Homelessness Resource List
http://go.usa.gov/GFdC

State Child Abuse Reporting Numbers
http://go.usa.gov/GFAJ

Continuum of Care Locator
www.hudexchange.info/grantees

Local Emergency Food & Shelter Program Board
www.efsp.unitedway.org

ACF Office of Early Childhood Development
acf.hhs.gov/ecd

The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA)
http://ectacenter.org

U.S. Department of Education – Office of Special Education Programs
http://www2.ed.gov/about//offices/list/osers

IDEA State Part C Coordinators and Referral Website
http://ectacenter.org/contact/ptccoord.asp

IDEA State Part B Coordinators and Referral Website
http://ectacenter.org/contact/619coord.asp

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
http://idea.ed.gov