



PARENT HANDBOOK

**A Family-Centred
Early Intervention Program
for Children, Birth to Six**

Helping children to reach their full potential for more than 30 years.

Questions or concerns about your rights and privacy at Children First?

You may speak with any staff member with whom you are involved or contact our Privacy Officer, who has been designated to provide further information about our practices and to receive and respond to concerns that may arise.

**Sharri Hamelin,
Privacy Officer
Children First
3295 Quality Way,
Suite 102
Windsor, ON N8T 3R9
519-250-1850 ext. 290
privacyofficer@children-
first.ca**

You may also contact the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario regarding your privacy rights, or a privacy issue that you have not been able to resolve directly with us, at:

**Information and Privacy
Commissioner of Ontario
2 Bloor Street East, Suite
1400, Toronto, Ontario,
M4W 1A8
1-800-387-0073
www.ipc.on.ca**

To access our complete Privacy Statement you may request a copy from a staff person or visit our website
www.children-first.ca

YOUR PRIVACY IS IMPORTANT TO US

Your privacy is very important to us, and we are striving to ensure our policies and procedures meet or exceed the privacy standards established by the laws in Ontario.

Our Privacy Statement provides details regarding:

- **What type of personal information we may collect, and how it is collected, used, and shared; for example:**
 - We collect and use personal information as reasonably necessary to provide quality services, conduct regular business practices, and comply with legal requirements.
 - Personal information is usually collected directly from the person to whom it pertains (or the person who is legally entitled to make decisions for that person, such as a parent).
 - With very few exceptions that are required or permitted by law, we do not share personal information with anyone outside of Children First without first obtaining consent from the individual to whom the information pertains (or the person who can make decisions for that person).
- **How we maintain and dispose of personal information, keeping it safe and confidential; we also inform individuals if their personal information is stolen, lost, or improperly accessed.**
- **The right to withhold or withdraw consent for us to collect, use, or disclose information.**
- **How to view and request correction of your personal information.**
- **Legally required or permitted exceptions that may pertain to our collection, use, and disclosure of personal information, or to your access of your personal information; for example:**
 - We are required to disclose personal information in situations of suspected child abuse or neglect.
 - We disclose information that has been legally compelled (e.g., during a court proceeding).
 - We may disclose information in situations involving imminent risk of serious bodily harm.

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HOW TO CONTACT US:

By Mail:

3295 Quality Way, Suite 102
Windsor, Ontario N8T 3R9

By Phone: (519) 250-1850

By Fax: (519) 250-4124

Refer to our Web site: www.children-first.ca

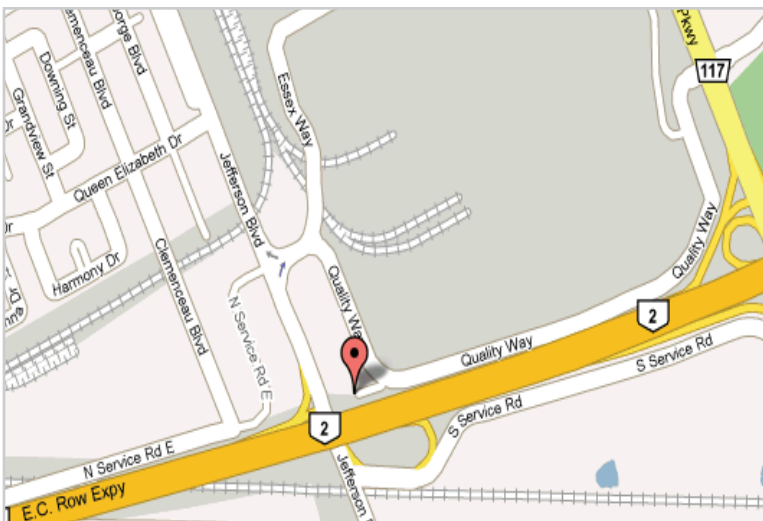
DIRECTIONS TO CHILDREN FIRST:

Travelling east on E C Row:

Exit onto Jefferson. Head north on Jefferson to first light. Turn right on Quality Way then stay on Quality Way by taking the sharp curve to the right. Children First will be on your right (tall building with red on it).

Travelling west on E C Row:

Exit onto Lauzon Parkway North. Turn left at first light onto Quality Way. Children First will be on your left.



IF YOU NEED HELP

Children First offices are open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. If you experience a crisis or emergency after hours, please contact one of the following:

- 911 Emergency (Ambulance/Fire/Police)
- If your child is at immediate risk to harm themselves or another person proceed to the Emergency Room of the Windsor Regional Hospital-Metropolitan Campus or call 911
- Windsor Regional Children's Center Walk In Clinic 3901 Connaught
Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday 12:00-6:00 p.m.
- Community Crisis Centre (24 hour Crisis line) (Adult Crisis Services)
Telephone: 519-973-4435
- Inquiries for all community, social and health services: 211

WHO ARE WE?

Children First is a family centred early intervention program. We are funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to offer Children's Mental Health and Infant and Child Development services and by the City of Windsor to offer Special Needs Resourcing to child care programs. Our agency is accredited by Children's Mental Health Ontario and we are members of the Ontario Association for Infant and Child Development. Children First is also a registered charity that can accept donations.

WHO CAN USE OUR SERVICES?

Children First offers services to families of children between birth and six years of age who have special needs (developmental and/or mental health or are at risk for either) and live in the Windsor and Essex County area. A diagnosis is not required for families to access services.

OUR MISSION

Children First in Essex County partners with families and the community to provide individualized support for children (birth to six years) with developmental and/or mental health challenges, helping them reach their full potential through early identification, education, and clinical intervention.

OUR VISION

Children First is a leader in providing services where:

- All children and families are supported to help them reach their full potential;
- Children are supported to feel a sense of inclusion and belonging in the community;
- Relationships are nurtured with families, partner organizations and the community to assist children who have developmental and/or mental health challenges;
- Timely and tailored supports are provided by professional staff who use innovative evidence-based practices.

OUR VALUES

We believe in:

- Supporting the child's best interest, recognizing that family relationships are the foundation for growth and learning.
- Providing timely, flexible services that support children to reach their potential.
- Promoting continuous learning, innovation and evidence-based services among our valued staff.
- Honouring our partners and committing to work together to address the unique and evolving needs of children, families and the community.

HOW ARE REFERRALS MADE?

Parents may call us directly with questions, concerns or to make a referral. Anyone involved with your child (e.g., a preschool teacher, physician, or social worker) can also make the referral (by telephone or fax). We will always contact the parent/guardian to ensure you are in agreement to the referral and that you are willing to be an active participant in services before proceeding. Our services are voluntary and we will review the risks and benefits of participating in services and the risks of not participating (refer to Risks and Benefits Statement included in this booklet) to assist you in making an informed choice about consenting to service. We will review the risks and benefits and your consent to service on a regular basis.

WHAT ARE OUR HOURS?

Office hours are 8:30 to 4:30, Monday through Friday. Flexibility can be provided outside of these hours for meetings or visits if required. Some of our group programs are offered in the evenings.

WHAT IS THE COST?

Our services are offered at no cost to you. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the City of Windsor, and the Essex Preschool Speech and Language Initiative provide most of our funding. Fundraising and donations help to enhance this funding.

DIVERSITY

At Children First we strive to acknowledge and respect the diversity of our community as it relates to language, culture, religion, physical/emotional/mental health, and/or sexual orientation. Access to our services is not limited based on any of the above. We wish to learn more about how our services can be delivered in ways that are helpful, sensitive, and respectful of your family's beliefs, values, customs and culture. Please help us to know of any special consideration(s).

If English is not your first language you can invite someone you know to translate for us or we can make arrangements to have a translator present if needed. A few of our materials are translated into different languages and we do have some staff that speak other languages, but we currently provide services only in English and French.

WE USE A TEAM APPROACH

Our approach is to work with you in a partnership relationship to address the individual needs of your child and family. Your family will be assigned a primary staff person to work with at Children First. This primary partner, often a **Resource Consultant or Social Worker** has developmental and/or mental health expertise to assist you and your child. Your primary partner may access other professional services to help address the needs/goals outlined in your child's service plan. For example, if your child is having difficulty with mobility or movement a **physiotherapist** may be asked to provide input. If your child is having difficulty with the tasks of daily living or fine motor skills an **occupational therapist** may be consulted. If communication is a concern for your child, a **speech language pathologist** may offer assistance. If you have parenting or family relationship concerns or your child needs assistance coping, a **social worker** may be helpful. A **child psychologist** may be able to provide a diagnosis or oversee more complex concerns. From time to time, Children First offers groups that may be applicable to you and your child. We work as a team with you and other professionals, agencies, and school systems that may be involved with your child and family. If it is determined that needs are best addressed by another community service provider, we will assist you in accessing those services.

WHO DO WE WORK WITH?

We prepare and implement a plan for service with the legal guardian or custodial parent(s). To ensure consistency for the child it is recommended that both parents are involved in services. When parents are separated or divorced, it is generally beneficial for your child that intervention strategies and reports also be shared with the non-custodial parent if

they have access. If parents live in separate households and share custody, service can be made available to both parents and reports are addressed accordingly. Please provide documentation you may have that clarifies custody and access arrangements (and subsequent updates) for our records.

We find that if you and all caregivers, across all environments, are using the same strategies, progress towards meeting the goals that you have for your child is more likely. To assist with this we can extend our professional consultation/support to early learning and child care programs throughout Windsor and Essex County so that they are better able to address the special needs of your child. If you have a private child care provider or respite provider who can assist in carrying out intervention strategies, we'd be pleased to assist you in sharing these techniques with them as well.

WHERE SERVICES ARE OFFERED

Services occur in the most natural setting for the child, as deemed clinically appropriate for the service plan needs/goals. This may include your family's home, at the child's early learning and child care centre, at an Ontario Early Years Centre, or at the Children First office.

HOW WE BEGIN & WORK TOGETHER

We expect you to be actively involved in all aspects of service and decision making. During our first visits together, we will gather information about the strengths and needs of your child and family. This will include looking at the make up of your family as well as your child's birth and developmental history. We explore your sources of support and the outcomes you expect. A meeting will occur with you and possible others involved to discuss roles, responsibilities, and recommendations. The staff person from our program will ensure this **'Intake Assessment Summary'** information is reviewed with a multidisciplinary team of agency professionals for input. Any feedback will be shared with you to assist with service planning. At this point it will be determined who your ongoing primary partner will be.

Based on the recommendations arising from the intake assessment, this primary partner will work with you to develop an **Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)**. The IFSP outlines specific goals that you and your primary partner (and others involved as appropriate) will work on together, and the steps to achieve them. Depending on the needs and goals, we can access other professionals on staff for specialized assessment, consultation, and/or counselling (refer to the 'We Use A Team Approach' section on page 7). Goals specific to your child's early learning and child care setting will be included in your IFSP. The IFSP will be reviewed with all participants in the plan at least every 6 months. These reviews are used to measure how our work together is progressing, to identify if other services or changes are needed, and to let us know when our work together is completed.

THE RIGHTS OF FAMILIES AT CHILDREN FIRST

If you receive services from Children First you have the right:

- and responsibility to be a full partner in all aspects of your child and family's involvement with Children First. This will include identifying your needs, assisting with choosing and implementing strategies to achieve your goals, and helping to measure the outcomes;
- to be treated with dignity and respect, without discrimination;
- to privacy and confidentiality;
- to an accessible, safe and secure service environment at Children First;
- to receive services in a format suitable to your communication needs;
- to bring forward a concern or complaint; and
- to discontinue your involvement with Children First.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT OF STAFF

- That staff have the skills, expertise and appropriate training to assist you.
- That staff behave in a professional manner, be on time for appointments, and treat you with respect.
- That you will be notified in advance of any cancellations of appointments and will be contacted in a timely way to reschedule.
- That staff will listen to you and support the decisions that you make.
- That staff will provide individualized services based on the presenting needs and concerns.
- That staff will answer any questions you may have about your child, our service, or information in general. If they are unable to respond they will guide you to someone who has the answers.
- That staff will keep your information confidential by not sharing information about you, your family and/or your child with anyone outside of Children First without your permission (refer to the 'Confidentiality and Consent' section on page 12).

WHAT WE ASK OF YOU

- That you update your primary partner when any of your or your child's personal or health information changes (i.e. address, phone number, marital or custody status, medical findings).
- That you be present, prepared for, and participate actively in each appointment. This will mean minimizing distractions such as visitors, phone calls, etc. so you can talk with and/or join in with the staff person's activities. As you will be implementing strategies between visits it is important for you to ask the staff any questions so you fully understand what it is you're doing and why. If you run into problems between visits please call the staff person.
- That you let us know as soon as possible of cancellations and reschedule with the staff person as soon as possible. Also notify us if your child will not be present at child care, if our staff consults there. To ensure progress, it is important to keep cancellations to a minimum.

- That you return staff phone calls in a timely manner (preferably within 48 hours).
- That you notify the staff person prior to a scheduled visit if you or your child (or another person in your home) is ill. We travel to the homes of many families and need to reduce the risk of spreading illness.
- Please make staff aware of anything that could be a health and safety risk prior to visits.
- Due to staff allergies/sensitivities and to ensure their safety we ask that you limit our exposure to pets, fragrances, and that you do not smoke during our visits.
- That you keep track of any toys, books and equipment loaned to you and return them in good condition.
- That you be open in your communication with us. Let your staff person(s) know of any compliment, concern and/or complaint you may have regarding their service (see page 13 for 'Steps for Resolving Issues or Concerns').

HOW LONG WILL SERVICES LAST?

The length of service will vary based on your child's/family's needs. Discharge will occur when:

- The goals and objectives have been met and/or you feel confident you have the information and strategies to address your child's developmental/mental health functioning.
- The needs of your child or family have changed indicating that service is no longer required or appropriate.
- You are unable or not interested in participating in services *.
- You move out of the Windsor Essex area.
- Your child turns six.

If required, staff will assist you in transitioning to next step services or assist you in linking up with similar services in a new community should you move.

***NB** If your child suffers from a mental, emotional or developmental condition that, if not remedied, could seriously impair the child's development, you as a parent have the responsibility to access the professional services your child requires. Although our services are voluntary, we may be obligated to make a report to the Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society if you close off services against recommendations, and do not seek the necessary services elsewhere. (See the 'Agency Risks and Benefits Statement' beginning on page 14)

CLIENT RECORDS

As soon as your child is referred to Children First an electronic record and a clinical file are opened. This clinical file is a record of our involvement with your child and family. It will include all of the information we receive or generate, including but not limited to: intake information; identifying demographic information; all assessment reports; Individual Family Service Plans, visit notes and review notes; all correspondence; physician or other medical reports; reports or correspondence from other professionals; any legal documents received; consent forms; discharge information; etc. This file is kept in a secure area. After your involvement with Children First ends, your file will be kept for a minimum of 30 years in a secure storage area. After 30 years, the whole file will be shredded by a certified information destruction company.

You will receive copies of reports and correspondence written by staff of Children First as they occur and pertain to your child. As the child's parent/legal guardian you have the right to review your child's file. Also, you can request a correction be made to your personal or health information or that of your child at any time.

Please refer to 'Your Privacy Is Important' contained in this handbook or go directly to our website www.children-first.ca to review our privacy statement.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONSENT

Children First recognizes the importance of privacy and the sensitivity of personal health information. We adhere to the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004 ("PHIPA"). Any and all information provided to us is treated in a confidential manner. We require consent, signed by you, before we share information outside of Children First.

There are some times when we are required to release information without your consent. For example, by law, we must report any suspected abuse or neglect of children to the Children's Aid Society for investigation. In addition, the courts can subpoena file information without your consent.

All Children First staff sign an Oath of Confidentiality. Your primary partner at Children First is part of a multidisciplinary team. Information about your child/family will be reviewed within this team. Staff of Children First working directly with your child/family will share information with each other. This internal information sharing is to coordinate services to ensure we are meeting the needs of your child and your family.

Please refer to 'Your Privacy Is Important' on page 1 or go directly to our website www.children-first.ca to review our privacy statement and/or privacy policy.

STEPS FOR RESOLVING ISSUES OR CONCERNS

If an issue or concern comes up during our service:

1. Please talk about it directly with the staff person to whom it relates, as soon as possible, so that it may be resolved.
2. If the issue or concern is not resolved, you or the staff person to whom it relates may request a phone call or meeting with the staff person's supervisor. You can expect that the supervisor will begin to address the issue/concern within 7 days of the discussion that you have with him or her.
3. If you feel your issue/concern is not being addressed to your

satisfaction, you are always welcome to put it in writing. In any case, Children First will work toward a solution with input from management as appropriate.

4. If you feel that the steps above have not resolved your concern, you may contact our Executive Director. When all else fails, our Board of Directors may also be contacted.

YOUR FEEDBACK IS HELPFUL

We look forward to working with your family, and value your opinions about our partnership and the services we provide. We will be asking you to comment on your experience with our services at various times, such as during IFSP reviews or after participating in a group. We will also ask you to complete satisfaction surveys from time to time. Offering us your input (compliments or concerns) in a timely way helps us understand what is working well for your child and family, and what changes we might make to improve our services.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU TO BE INVOLVED

If you would like to provide support and/or input into the work of Children First please let your primary partner know. We promote parent involvement as volunteers, mentors, participants for focus groups, service evaluation, etc. and appreciate your expressions of interest in such activities.

GROUP SERVICES OFFERED

Children First offers a variety of groups for our client families and in the larger community. These groups can be a method of treatment; a way to support you or your family; and/or to provide you with an opportunity to connect with other parents. Please go to the website (www.children-first.ca) for details about the various groups and talk to your primary partner if interested.

AGENCY RISKS AND BENEFITS STATEMENT

Children First provides a wide range of services for families with children from birth to age six, who have developmental and/or mental health challenges. Our early identification and intervention services can dramatically improve your child's development and/ or mental health and prevent additional concerns from arising. Also, we can help you to feel confident that everything possible is being done to ensure your child reaches his or her full potential.

There are many other benefits to services:

- We can provide feedback about your child's functioning, and thereby increase your understanding and the understanding of other service providers about your child's strengths and needs.
- We can contribute to better understanding your child's special needs and the factors influencing those needs.
- We may be able to increase your child's and family's access to eligible services.
- We may identify concerns that were not apparent at the outset of service, and we may be able to help you and your child with these concerns as well.

It is important to realize that there are also risks associated with any service, and there are consequences of working with an agency like ours that you may not have expected:

- Early intervention will not help every child and family. Although we will always do our best to help the children and families whom we serve, some will not experience beneficial changes. For some children and families, an issue or condition might become more difficult or problematic during or after service.

Other risks that can arise as a result of your or your child's participation in this service include:

- We may ask you and your child questions, or discuss issues that might be sensitive and raise uncomfortable feelings for you, your child or your family.

- We may provide feedback or communicate a diagnosis which you did not anticipate or not agree with.
- Additional concerns may be identified other than concerns and questions initially brought forward for this service, and this may cause you upset.

Children and families participating in service should also be aware that we (and all agencies like Children First) collect and use personal information in order to provide treatment and other services. Some of the consequences of this include:

- Although our service is voluntary, if serious needs have been identified (medical, physical, emotional and social) that are not being addressed through service with our agency or another agency within the community, we may be required to report to Children's Aid Society about implications of lack of follow through and risk for your child.
- If we become aware of other child protective risks such as domestic conflict or lack of appropriate supervision, these must be reported to the Children's Aid Society, as required by law.
- You may be asked personal information about your child, yourself, and extended family members and that information may be included as file information or as part of a report.
- With your permission, we may seek out information from other sources (e.g., child care, school, babysitter), and in turn, identify that Children First services are being provided.
- The information that we collect is stored in your child's file and might be accessed in the future without your consent (as required by law or professional standards).

We have a **Privacy Policy** which explains how we collect, use and share personal health information about our clients. Please review our Privacy Policy to find out more about our information practices. It is also available on our website at www.children-first.ca.

It is important that you are aware of the risks and benefits of service before you and your child consent to and participate in services with us. Please ensure that you understand all of the information (page 14-16) and that you have asked us, and have received answers to, every question you may have. You can ask us questions about this information at any time, even after you start service.

THE MEANING OF COMMON TERMS YOU MAY HEAR

Accreditation: Accreditation is a process by which site reviewers come to Children First every four years to examine all aspects of the program against some very rigorous standards. There are standards related to program; staffing; governance; management; and administration. Children First has been able to meet all of the accreditation standards set out and are committed to meeting them in an ongoing way.

Early Intervention: At Children First we believe strongly in intervening early. This is when services and strategies are put in place early in the child's life to reduce the impact of the delay/difficulty on the child. It is often much easier and you can sometimes have profound impacts on children's development if you begin with services as soon as you notice a concern or delay. Once the child develops poor motor patterns or compensates in less than ideal ways (e.g. behaviour outbursts to compensate for poor expressive language skills), it is much more difficult for both the child and adults. We, for this reason, do not support the 'wait and see' approach.

Behaviour: Children often communicate their feelings of excitement, frustration, anger, anxiousness, etc. or simply their desire to get their needs/wants met through their behaviour. Some ways of behaving can be socially unacceptable (hitting, screaming, biting, etc.) and children often need to learn/be shown/assisted with better ways of coping or dealing with strong emotions. This is often done through encouraging positive behaviours and dealing consistently, confidently and calmly with challenging or negative behaviours

Development: All infants & children learn, grow and develop at their own pace. Sometimes children fall behind in some areas of development (see below) and need intervention to ensure that the impact of this lag is lessened and the child can reach his/her potential. When professionals observe or assess development, they consider how the child is achieving in different aspects of development compared to other children the same age. The seven major areas of development usually considered include:

COGNITIVE- *This describes, for example, the child's understanding of object permanence, concepts such as large and small, classification, memory, problem-solving, etc.*

GROSS MOTOR- *What the child can do with large muscle groups, such as rolling, sitting, running, jumping, throwing, catching and climbing.*

FINE MOTOR- *What the child can do with small muscle groups, including building with blocks; picking up, holding, handling, and fitting small objects into other containers; banging things together; and doing puzzles.*

SOCIAL- *How the child relates to and/or interacts with peers and adults.*

EMOTIONAL- *This includes the child's affective display, temperament, and/or the manner in which they cope with or express strong emotions.*

COMMUNICATION & LANGUAGE- *Considers both receptive (i.e., what the child understands) and expressive language (what the child can say). Gestures and other forms of non-verbal communication are also considered here.*

SELF HELP/PROBLEM SOLVING- *How the child attends to his own needs such as feeding/dressing/hygiene. Are they able to find solutions to challenges they face?*

FamilyCentred Services: Refers to a particular approach to intervention that aims to support and strengthen parents' abilities to nurture and enhance child well being and development. The pivotal role of the family is recognized and respected in the lives of children with special needs. With this approach families should be supported in their natural care giving and decision-making roles by building upon their unique strengths as people and families.

Mediator Model: A form of service delivery that actively involves the child's key caregivers (who become the 'mediators') in the implementation of intervention strategies/recommendations.

Primary Partner: Refers to the key contact staff person that will work closely with you. They can assist you in identifying your child's strengths and needs; provide intervention strategies for you (and other caregivers) to try out; coordinate any of the other services from Children First (and the surrounding community) as needed; assist you with ways to incorporate any suggestions into your daily routines and ensure that a service plan is in place and is reviewed at least every six months.

This person should be considered your 'partner' in ensuring your child reaches their personal potential and supporting you to be the best parent you can be.

Children First is committed to providing accessible customer service to all persons with visible and non-visible disabilities. We welcome your comments about our service and any barriers you may have encountered. A copy of our Accessibility and Customer Service policy is available upon request.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Emergency (Ambulance/Fire/Police): 911

Poison Control: 1-800-268-9017

Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society: 519-252-1171

Hiatus House: 519-252-7781

Windsor-Essex County Health Unit:

Windsor Office: 519-258-2146

Essex Office: 519-776-5933

Leamington Office: 519-326-5716

Telehealth Ontario: 1 866-797-0000

**Community Crisis Centre (24 hour Crisis line)
(Adult Crisis Services):** 519-973-4435

Family Respite Services: 519-972-9688

HELP LINK: 519-252-2313

Inquiries for all community, social and health services: 211



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