Cultivating Wellness: 8 Dimensions of Staff Well-being

Head Start programs are gardens ready for growing and sustaining wellness for both adults and children. Staff face daily demands and personal challenges. Yet, the work they engage in is important, and has potential to be both nurturing and fulfilling. Head Start programs offer nutrients to foster growth and keep staff in full bloom. Consider these eight dimensions of staff well-being, described in more detail in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's step-by-step guide to wellness.



How does your Head Start program grow wellness?

1 Occupational

The occupational dimension of wellness includes attitudes, values, and beliefs that are shown in the workplace, such as respect, self-efficacy, enrichment, and commitment to balanced and fair workloads. Head Start programs emphasize the importance of a culture of wellness. A culture of wellness is a collective approach across all program staff to make the workplace safe, healthy, energized, and even fun! Head Start leaders set the stage for a culture of wellness by promoting an organizational culture committed to wellness. This includes a work environment that eliminates hazards and supports staff efforts to maintain their personal health and safety. Programs offer time to exercise, immunization clinics, smoking cessation programs, stress management training, and healthy foods in the break room and vending machines.

2 Emotional

The emotional dimension of wellness includes the ability to express feelings and cope effectively with stress and challenges. Head Start programs help staff develop skills to support emotional wellness by encouraging them to recognize their feelings and the feelings of others, share and express emotions appropriately, and appreciate themselves and others. Head Start programs give emotional wellness education that includes a focus on finding signs of stress and developing a personal stress response plan.

3 Spiritual

The spiritual dimension of wellness includes personal beliefs and values and having a sense of meaning, purpose, balance, and peace. Head Start programs support spiritual wellness by allowing staff to express or share their sense of calling, and purpose in the workplace. Staff can engage in fulfilling activities daily, and programs give time and space to reflect, meditate, or pray if desired.

4 Intellectual

The intellectual dimension of wellness includes having an active and curious mind. Head Start programs support intellectual wellness by recognizing that each staff member brings creative abilities, talents, and interests to their work. Programs encourage staff to find ways to expand knowledge and skills through ongoing professional development and allowing staff to share their creative interests with co-workers, children, and families. Staff have opportunities to examine their strengths and areas of growth and work together with their supervisors to develop professional development plans that expand their knowledge and improve skills.

Office of Head Start National Center

National Center on
Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety



5 Physical

The physical dimension of wellness includes healthy habits for nutrition, physical activity, and sleep, strategies to prevent injuries, and access to health care. Head Start programs support the physical well-being of their staff by promoting and supporting recommended routine health care examinations, screening tests, and immunizations. Head Start programs plan staff wellness activities, including health education on injury prevention, substance use, and common health concerns for early childhood staff. Head Start programs also support the individual health needs of their staff.

6 Environmental

The environmental dimension of wellness includes a healthy workplace, healthy homes, and healthy communities. Through regular inspections, Head Start programs identify possible environmental health issues. Then programs work to mitigate staff exposure to toxins in the air, water, soil, or food, chemicals, and other hazards. Head Start programs offer environmental health education that supports an understanding of environmental wellness, including environmental health issues that are specific to the community and region.

7 Financial

The financial dimension of wellness includes being financially well, understanding financial processes, and having access to resources to support financial stability. Head Start programs offer support to staff for their financial health by sharing financial resources, scheduling community members to speak with staff in a group or one on one for budgeting and other fiscal advice, and helping staff make the most of their benefits packages and take advantage of fiscal planning resources in the community.

8 Social

The social dimension of wellness includes positive social relationships and interactions with others and a strong sense of community. Head Start programs encourage staff to connect with others in meaningful ways and expand their networks of support. Head Start programs can give opportunities for staff to participate regularly in reflective supervision or consultation, team-building activities, or other social activities. Also, Head Start programs work to connect staff to community services and supports (e.g., support groups, exercise classes, spiritually oriented spaces).

Office of Head Start · National Center ·

National Center on
Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety

888-227-5125
health@ecetta.info
https://headstart.gov/health

May 2025

If this file is a printed copy or is shared detached from HeadStart.gov, please verify periodically that it is the most current version.
This resource is supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling $8,450,000 with 100% funded by ACF. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, ACF/HHS or the U.S. Government.