

Welcome = to = **HEAD START**



WEST TEXAS OPPORTUNITIES

Parent Handbook

..... 2026-2027



Serving Children • Supporting Families
Strengthening Our Community



Thank you for choosing Head Start. We are excited to partner with you in your child's early learning journey. We are committed to providing a safe, nurturing, and engaging environment where every child can learn and grow. We look forward to working together to support your child's success throughout the year. Thank you for being a part of our Head Start family.

*Brooke Adcock
Head Start Director*



We also believe that families play the most important role in a child's development. By working together, we can create meaningful learning experiences both at school and at home. Throughout the year, you'll have opportunities to participate in your child's education, connect with community resources, and become involved in our program.

This handbook provides an overview of our program, answers frequently asked questions, and explains what you can expect as a Head Start family. It was built using the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) and the Child Care Regulations. The minimum standards that this book is built from can be reviewed in your site's Center Director's office. If you have questions at any time, we're here to help.

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Getting started

What makes Head Start different?

Head Start is more than an early childhood education program. We look at the whole child and the whole family.

Your child's learning is connected to their health, relationships, development, and family life. That's why Head Start brings education, health, family support, and family engagement together as part of one program.

Head Start also recognizes that families are their children's first and most important teachers. We partner with families to build on their strengths, support their goals, and help children get ready for school and life beyond Head Start.



More than Preschool

Head Start brings learning, health, family support, and family engagement together so children and families can thrive.

What can I expect from Head Start?

You can expect Head Start staff to treat your child and family with respect, care, and understanding. We will work with you to support your child's learning, health, development, and well-being.

You can expect:

- A safe, welcoming, and supportive learning environment.
- Teachers and staff who communicate with you about your child's experiences and progress.
- Opportunities to participate in your child's learning and in the Head Start community.
- Support in accessing health, developmental, and community resources when needed.
- Respect for your family's culture, language, experiences, and strengths.
- Staff who listen to your questions and work with you when concerns or challenges arise.

What are the program hours?

Program	Schedule
Head Start	August – May
Early Head Start	August – July
Hours	Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Meals Provided	Breakfast, Lunch, Snack
Questions?	Contact your Family Services staff member or Center Director



Remember: Your child's teacher will provide the daily classroom schedule during orientation. While each classroom has its own routine, all children benefit from arriving on time.

What should my child bring?

Please dress your child in comfortable clothing suitable for active indoor and outdoor play and in accordance to the weather for the day. Closed-toe shoes are recommended for safety. We also encourage families to send an extra change of clothing in case of spills or accidents.



Label backpacks, jackets, blankets, and extra clothing with your child's name to help prevent lost items.

Early Head Start:

Formula (if brand is not provided at the center), breast milk, or other approved nutritional items, if applicable.



To help prevent lost or damaged items, please leave toys and other valuable personal belongings at home.

Can I send food from home?

Breakfast, lunch, and a snack are provided each day to every child in attendance.



To help protect children with food allergies and meet nutrition requirements:

Outside food and drinks are not permitted unless approved by the program for a documented medical or special dietary need.



How do I update my information?

Please let us know as soon as possible if any of your family's information changes during the program year, including:

- ❖ Home address or mailing address
- ❖ Phone number or email address
- ❖ Emergency contacts
- ❖ Employment information
- ❖ Custody or legal documentation
- ❖ Medical information, including allergies or health conditions
- ❖ Health insurance or physician information
- ❖ Individuals authorized to pick up your child

Keeping your information current helps us contact you quickly in an emergency and ensures your child receives the support they need.

If you need to update your information, contact your Family Services staff member or Center Director.

Daily Attendance

Why is attendance important?

Every day at Head Start is an opportunity for your child to learn, build friendships, and develop important school readiness skills. Regular attendance helps children establish routines, build confidence, and get the most from their Head Start experience.



If your family is experiencing challenges that make it difficult for your child to attend regularly, please reach out to us. Head Start staff are here to listen, connect you with resources, and work with you to support your child's continued participation in the program.

What if my child will be absent?

If your child will be absent, please notify your center by **8:30 a.m.** each day they are absent. This helps us ensure your child's safety and allows us to plan for the day.

Arrival & Dismissal



What time should my child arrive?

Classrooms are unlocked at 7:45 a.m. Children should arrive no later than 8:30 a.m. so they can participate in breakfast, classroom routines, and the full instructional day.

What time should I pick up my child?

Please pick up your child at their scheduled dismissal time. If an emergency will delay you, contact your center as soon as possible so we know your child is safe and can make appropriate arrangements.

Who can pick up my child?

Your child's safety guides our release procedures. To help ensure every child is released safely, please follow these guidelines:

- Children must be signed in and out each day by a parent or authorized adult in accordance with center procedures.
- Your child may only be released to a parent or an individual listed as an authorized pick-up person over the age of 16.
- If a parent or authorized pick-up person is **not known to staff**, they will be asked to present a valid photo ID before your child is released.
- Please keep your authorized pick-up list current. If you need to add or remove someone, notify your center as soon as possible.
- If someone not listed needs to pick up your child due to an emergency, contact the center before dismissal. Staff will explain the steps needed to authorize the change.
- If there are court orders or custody documents that affect who may pick up your child, please provide a current copy to the center. The program can only enforce legal documents that have been provided to us.

Health & Safety

Why does Head Start ask for health information?

As part of enrollment and our ongoing health services, we will ask families to provide current health information for their child. This information helps us understand your child's health needs, provide a safe learning environment, and work with you to make sure recommended health services and follow-up care are received.

- ❖ Medical/dental home within 30 days
- ❖ A current physical exam
- ❖ A current dental exam
- ❖ Update to date immunization records or exemptions on file
- ❖ Hemoglobin test at 12 months
- ❖ Lead tests at 12 & 24 months
- ❖ Updates whenever your child's health information changes

How does Head Start support my child's health?

Children learn best when they're healthy. That's why Head Start provides comprehensive health services that support your child's physical, oral, developmental, and emotional well-being.

Throughout the program year, our Family Service staff partners with families to help ensure children receive recommended preventive health care and any needed follow-up services.

Health services include:

- Physical (well-child) exams
- Immunizations
- Vision and hearing screenings for children 3-5 years old
- Developmental and behavioral screenings
- Follow-up care and referrals, when needed
- Dental exams and preventive oral health care

What if my child needs additional health care?

Sometimes a screening, physical exam, or dental visit identifies a need for additional care. If this happens, we'll work with you to understand the recommendation and help connect your family with appropriate services.

- ❖ Explaining recommended follow-up care.
- ❖ Connecting you with community healthcare providers or specialists.
- ❖ Assisting with referrals when appropriate
- ❖ Following up to ensure your child receives the services they need



When families and staff work together, children are healthier, attend school more consistently, and are better prepared to learn.

Our goal is to partner with families, not replace your healthcare provider. We encourage families to establish and maintain a medical and dental home for their child and will gladly assist if help is needed finding providers or community resources.



If your family needs assistance obtaining a healthcare provider or dentist, we're here to help.

If cost, transportation, or finding a provider is making it difficult to complete a health requirement, please let us know.

When should I keep my child home?

Helping keep children healthy is a partnership between families and the Head Start Program. If your child is sick, please keep them home to help prevent illness from spreading to other children and staff.

Please keep your child home if they have:

- A fever
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- A contagious illness
- Symptoms that prevent them from comfortably participating in classroom activities



If you're unsure whether your child should attend, please contact your center.

Children may return to school when they meet the program's health guidelines or when otherwise approved by their healthcare provider.

What happens if my child gets sick or is injured?

If your child becomes ill with any of the following symptoms while in our care, you will be called to pick up your child within 30 minutes of being called:

- ❖ Armpit temperature above 100.4 **AND**
 - lethargy, • abnormal breathing,
 - uncontrolled diarrhea,
 - rash, or • mouth drooling
- ❖ Two or more vomiting episodes
- ❖ Chicken pox / Ringworm
- ❖ Three or more diarrhea episodes
- ❖ Sore, red throat
- ❖ Earache with pain
- ❖ Deep, hacking cough
- ❖ Severe congestion
- ❖ Difficulty breathing or wheezing
- ❖ Unexplained rash
- ❖ Stiff neck and headache **AND** the above symptoms
- ❖ Thick green nasal drainage **AND** a fever
- ❖ Red eyes with discharge/crust
- ❖ Open blisters, pus-filled or oozing.

If your child becomes ill or is injured while at the center, staff will provide appropriate care and contact you as soon as possible. If we are unable to reach you, we will contact the emergency contacts listed in your child's record.



If your child experiences a serious illness or injury that requires immediate medical attention, emergency medical services (911) will be contacted. A staff member will remain with your child until you or your emergency contact arrives.

Can my child receive medication at school?

Whenever possible, medication should be given at home. No over the counter medication will be given by the staff. When medication must be administered during program hours, the Head Start Program will follow all applicable health and safety requirements.

Before medication can be administered:

- A Medication Administration form must be completed and sent to the Health Coordinator.
- Parents must sign the Authorization for Dispensing Medication form.
- Medication must be in its original container with the child's name and dosage instructions.
- Prescription medication must include the pharmacy label.

How do you support children with allergies or special health needs?

We are committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for every child. If your child has allergies, asthma, diabetes, seizures, or another medical condition, please let us know before your child's first day of attendance to develop a Special Health Care Plan and have it in place before their first day!



If your child's health needs change during the year, please notify your center as soon as possible.

How do you keep children safe?

Head Start staff actively supervise children throughout the day and maintain learning environments designed to support children's health and safety.



To help us keep every child safe, we ask families to:

- ❖ Keep emergency contact information current.
- ❖ Follow authorized pick-up procedures.
- ❖ Share custody or court order updates with the center.
- ❖ Notify staff of any changes to your child's health or medical needs.

How do you keep infants safe during sleep?

Infants under one have specific sleep safety needs. Early Head Start follows safe sleep practices that meet the requirements of the **HSPPS** and **Child Care Regulation** to help reduce the risk of sleep-related infant deaths.

To provide a safe sleep environment, we:

- Always place infants on their backs for sleep unless we have written medical instructions from the child's healthcare provider for special sleep accommodations
- Use a safety-approved crib with a firm mattress and fitted sheet.
- Keep cribs free of blankets, pillows, stuffed animals, bumper pads, and other soft items.
- Closely supervise sleeping infants and conduct regular visual checks.
- Sanitizing procedures after each use and when soiled.
- Work with families to support safe sleep practices at both school and home.

Safe Sleep Saves Lives

Following safe sleep practices every time an infant sleeps helps reduce the risk of sleep-related infant deaths. If you have questions about our safe sleep practices, we're happy to talk with you.



What Happens During an Emergency?

The Head Start Program maintains emergency plans in place for situations such as severe weather, fire, medical emergencies, and other unexpected events. Staff regularly practice emergency drills to help children become familiar with safety procedures in a calm and age-appropriate way.

Be Prepared

Save your center's phone number in your contacts and watch for messages from the Head Start Program during emergency situations or weather-related closures.

If an emergency affects normal program operations, families will be notified as soon as possible using the program's communication methods. Please make sure your contact information remains current so we can reach you quickly if needed.

Learning at Head Start

How do children learn at Head Start?

Children learn best when they are actively involved, curious, and connected to the people around them. At Head Start, teachers create learning experiences that are intentional, hands-on, and appropriate for each child's age and stage of development.

Child learn through:

- ❖ Play and exploration
- ❖ Everyday experiences
- ❖ Relationships and conversation
- ❖ Hands-on experiences
- ❖ Practice and repetition
- ❖ Individualized support



What Will My Child Learn?

Every day at Head Start is filled with opportunities to learn through play, exploration, and meaningful interactions.

Our classrooms provide experiences that help children build the skills they'll need for kindergarten and beyond.

Throughout the year, your child will have opportunities to:

- ❖ Build language, early reading, and communication skills.
- ❖ Explore math, science, and problem-solving through hands-on activities.
- ❖ Develop friendships and learn to work with others.
- ❖ Practice self-confidence, independence, and emotional regulation.
- ❖ Express creativity through art, music, movement, and dramatic play.
- ❖ Strengthen large and small muscles through active indoor and outdoor play



Children 13+ months need 60-120 minutes daily of moderate to vigorous physical activity indoors and outdoors. Play can be structured and unstructured.

Play is important for all children!



How will I know how my child is doing?

Your child's teacher will regularly observe your child's learning and development throughout the year. These observations help us celebrate progress, identify strengths, and plan activities that support continued growth.



You're an Important Part of the Team

You know your child best. Your observations and ideas help us create meaningful learning experiences that support your child's growth.

We'll share your child's progress with you through:

- ❖ Parent-teacher conferences
- ❖ Ongoing conversations
- ❖ Family events
- ❖ Progress updates throughout the year

How does Head Start support my child's mental health?

Mental health is part of your child's overall health and well-being. Head Start creates supportive environments where children can develop social and emotional skills and receive additional support when needed.

Our teachers and staff work together to create supportive learning environments and respond when a child needs additional help. When concerns arise, we partner with families to understand what may be happening, identify strategies that can help, and connect families with additional resources when needed.

Head Start also works with mental health professionals to support teachers, children, and families. If your child needs additional support, you will be part of the conversation and the planning process.

Your Child's Well-Being Matters

Asking for help is part of supporting your child. If you have concerns about your child's emotions, behavior, relationships, or development, talk with your child's teacher or Family Service Staff member. We are here to listen, help, and connect your family with resources.

How does Head Start support children with disabilities?

Head Start welcomes eligible children of all abilities. We believe every child should have the opportunity to participate, learn, and build relationships in a supportive classroom environment.



If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), or another identified developmental need, we will work with you and the appropriate community or school partners to support your child's participation and success.



You do not need to have a diagnosis or an IEP/IFSP before sharing a concern. We can help you understand available resources and, when appropriate, connect you with professionals who can provide additional evaluation or support.

How do you guide children's behavior?

At Head Start, we see behavior as an opportunity to teach. Children are still learning how to express their feelings, communicate their needs, solve problems, and manage big emotions. Our staff use positive, age-appropriate guidance strategies to help children develop these skills.

Staff may use strategies such as:

- Modeling appropriate behavior.
- Giving clear, simple reminders.
- Redirecting children to another activity or learning opportunity.
- Offering choices when appropriate.
- Helping children identify and express their feelings.
- Teaching children how to solve problems and work through conflicts.
- Helping children calm their bodies and emotions before returning to learning or play.

We use Conscious Discipline® to help create safe, connected classrooms where children can learn these skills with support and encouragement.



Will I be notified if my child is having difficulty?

Yes. If concerns about your child's behavior become ongoing or begin to affect their learning or the classroom environment, we'll partner with you to better understand your child's needs and develop consistent strategies at home and at school.

Working together helps children feel supported and gives them the best opportunity for success.

Behavior Is Communication

When a child is having a difficult time, we look beyond the behavior to understand what the child may need. Our goal is to teach skills, build connection, and help children become more successful—not to punish them.

What types of discipline are not allowed?

The Head Start Program is committed to providing a safe, nurturing, and respectful environment for every child. Staff will never use corporal punishment or any form of discipline that is harsh, humiliating, frightening, or harmful.

When needed for safety, staff may use gentle physical guidance to help a child move away from an unsafe situation or activity. Physical guidance is never used as punishment.

Examples of prohibited practices include:

- ❖ Physical punishment of any kind.
- ❖ Threats, ridicule, or humiliation.
- ❖ Withholding food, rest, or bathroom privileges.
- ❖ Shouting at or verbally intimidating children.
- ❖ Any practice that places a child's physical or emotional well-being at risk.

Can my child be suspended or removed from Head Start?

Head Start does not use suspension or expulsion as a routine response to challenging behavior.

If a child's behavior creates a serious safety concern, staff will first work with the child and family to understand the concern and identify strategies and supports that can help. Our goal is to keep children engaged in their learning environment whenever possible.

Temporary suspension is used only as a last resort when a child's behavior poses a serious and ongoing safety threat. If this occurs, Head Start will work with the family and appropriate professionals to develop a plan to support the child's safe return to the program.



A child's daily schedule may be adjusted to support behavior regulation and successful participation in our program.

How can I support learning at home?

Learning doesn't stop when the school day ends. Simple everyday activities can make a big difference in your child's development.

You can support learning at home by:

Try It at Home
Ask your child to name how they're feeling today. Helping children recognize and talk about their emotions is one of the first steps in learning self-regulation. You'll learn more simple strategies like this through our Conscious Discipline® parent education videos and family meetings throughout the year.

- Reading together every day.
- Talking about your day and asking questions.
- Counting objects while shopping or cooking.
- Singing songs and telling stories.
- Encouraging your child to draw, create, and explore.
- Giving your child opportunities to make simple choices and solve problems independently.

Family Engagement

How can I be involved?

At Head Start, families are valued partners in every child's learning and development. There are many ways to be involved, and every family's participation looks different. Whether you volunteer regularly or simply stay connected with your child's teacher, your involvement helps your child succeed.

Every Family Matters

There isn't one "right" way to be involved. Every conversation, every question, and every shared experience helps strengthen your child's education.

You can stay involved by:

- ❖ Talking with your child's teacher.
- ❖ Attending parent-teacher conferences.
- ❖ Participating in family events and activities.
- ❖ Volunteering in the classroom or at program events.
- ❖ Sharing your ideas and feedback.
- ❖ Supporting learning at home through everyday activities.

What is policy council?

Policy Council gives parents the opportunity to help shape the Head Start Program. Parent representatives work alongside program leadership to review information, provide input, and participate in important program decisions.

Your Family Services staff member can provide more information if you're interested in serving as a parent representative.



How will we communicate?

Strong communication helps us work together to support your child's success. Throughout the year, you can expect to receive information through:

- The ChildPlus Parent App
- Phone calls, text messages, or emails
- Classroom newsletters
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Family events
- Notices sent home with your child



Stay Connected
Download the ChildPlus Parent App to receive messages, complete forms, and stay informed about your child's program.

How can Head Start support my family?

Head Start supports the whole family—not just the child. If you're interested in community resources, parenting information, education, employment opportunities, or other family supports, your Family Services staff member is here to help.

If you're not sure where to start, ask! We'll do our best to connect you with resources that meet your family's needs.

Parent Rights & Responsibilities

What are my rights as a parent?

As a Head Start parent, you have the right to, per Child Care Regulations §746.521:

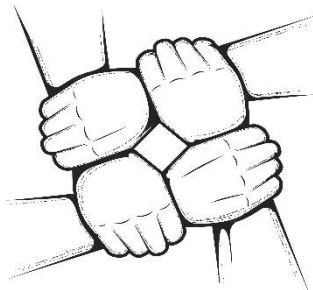
- Enter and examine the center during operating hours without advance notice.
- File a complaint.
- Review publicly accessible records.
- Review written records concerning their child.
- Receive the center's HHSC inspection reports and information about accessing compliance history online.
- Have the center comply with a valid court order restricting another parent's access/removal of the child.
- Receive local CCR contact information.
- View available video recordings of an alleged abuse/neglect incident involving their child, subject to the rule's protections for other children.
- Obtain a copy of the center's policies and procedures.
- Review staff training records and in-house training curriculum upon request.
- Be free from retaliation for exercising these rights.

We're Partners

We believe the best outcomes happen when families and staff work together with trust, respect, and open communication.

What are my responsibilities?

Families play an important role in creating a successful Head Start experience. We ask parents and caregivers to:



- Bring children to school regularly and on time.
- Keep emergency contact and health information current.
- Notify the center when your child will be absent.
- Follow the program's health and safety requirements.
- Treat children, families, volunteers, and staff with courtesy and respect.
- Communicate questions or concerns with program staff.
- Participate in your child's learning and stay informed about program activities whenever possible.

How can I share a question or concern?

If something isn't going as expected, we encourage you to start by talking with your child's teacher or Family Services staff member.



If additional assistance is needed, you may also contact your Center Director or the Head Start administrative office. Sharing your concern directly gives us an opportunity to listen, understand what happened, and work with you toward a solution.

Let's Talk First

Please give us an opportunity to hear from you directly before sharing it publicly or on social media. We may not know there is a problem until you tell us. A conversation gives us the opportunity to understand the situation, address concerns, and work toward a solution with you.

Your feedback helps us improve our program. If something isn't working well or you have an idea to share, please let us know. We want families to feel comfortable bringing questions and concerns to us.

Required Notices

How is my family's information protected?

Records are maintained in accordance with applicable federal and state confidentiality requirements. Information about your child and family is kept confidential and is shared only as permitted or required by law.



Your Privacy Matters

We are committed to protecting your family's personal information and using it only to support your child's education, health, and well-being.

If you have questions about your child's records or how information is shared, please contact your Family Services staff member or Center Director.

How does Head Start protect children?

The safety and well-being of children is everyone's responsibility. Under Texas law, Head Start staff are **mandatory reporters** and are required to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities. Reports are made in accordance with Texas law.

DFPS Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-252-5400

Report online: <https://txabusehotline.org>

Texas State Child Care Licensing: 432-684-3299



Is my family welcome at Head Start?

Absolutely! The Head Start Program welcomes all eligible children and families. We do not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, religion, or any other protected status. We are committed to creating an inclusive, respectful, and welcoming environment where every child and family feels valued.

How will I know about program closures?

Occasionally, the program may close due to severe weather, utility outages, or other emergencies. If this happens, we'll notify families as quickly as possible using the program's communication methods. Emergency preparedness plans are in each classroom.

Stay Connected

Save your center's phone number and enable notifications from the ChildPlus Parent App so you don't miss important updates.

Does Head Start support breastfeeding families?

Yes. The Head Start Program supports breastfeeding families and provides a welcoming environment for mothers who choose to breastfeed or provide expressed breast milk for their child. Please speak with your Center Director for a private area to breastfeed.

Liability Insurance Notice

The Head Start Program maintains liability insurance as required by Texas Child Care Regulation. Additional information is available upon request.

Gang-Free Zone Notice

Some Head Start centers are located in areas designated as Gang-Free Zones under Texas law. Additional penalties may apply to criminal offenses committed within these designated areas.

FAQs

What do I do if I'm running late for school?

Please contact your child's teacher, Family Service staff, or Center Director. If your arrival will be after the classroom doors are locked, you will need to go to the main office to be checked in. Then the staff will contact the classroom and open the door for you.

Can cell phones be used on site?

No cell phones or electronic devices are to be out during drop off and pick up in the classrooms. Staff use this time to connect with you about your child.

Can I visit my child's classroom?

Parents may visit and observe their child's center during operating hours without advance notice, subject to the center's safety and visitor procedures. For the safety of everyone in the building, all visitors must check in through the center office before entering the classroom.

What behavior is not accepted?

Behavior is a form of communication, however, to keep staff and children safe we encourage safe, friendly, and respectful behaviors. Those behaviors that are not accepted include: biting/spitting, cussing, physical violence, hurting others, and destroying property.

Can I celebrate my child's birthday?

We celebrate all children, but in order to support the safety of staff and children, we ask that outside food is not brought in. No classroom parties are allowed.

How does you handle head lice?

Head checks are done every Monday. A child will be sent home if there is an infestation of three or more live bugs. Your child must be treated and checked by a Family Service staff member before returning to the classroom.

Are animals allowed in the classrooms?

Staff will ensure "allowable" animals, according to Child Care Regulations, before being brought into the classroom. Appropriate safety and sanitation procedures will be followed during and after.

What if my child is still toilet training and/or has an accident?

We offer support in your toilet training journey. Teachers ask that you provide extra clothing for accidents.

Can grandparents or other family members participate at Head Start?

Yes! We welcome all family members to be involved at Head Start. Be involved through Parent Meetings, family events, or even reading to the class. There is no one way to be active in your child's education. Volunteering is always encouraged! If you plan to be a regular volunteer, you'll need to have a background check conducted.

Are water activities done at Head Start?

Yes, it is! Water in pools/tables will not be deeper than 12 inches for safety.

Does Head Start participate in field trips or ride buses?

Our 0-3 year old program does not participate in field trips. The 4 year old program that is integrated into the ISD does, and children riding the bus are expected to follow bus safety rules. Children will only be transported in case of an emergency.

Are sex offender allowed on site?

No persons that is on the National Sex Offender Registry are allowed on any of our Head Start locations, per state law. This includes parents or volunteers.

Does Head Start do picture day?

Yes! There are no specific days planned, but staff will let you know when it is scheduled.

Ask us! This handbook can't answer every question you may have. If you're unsure about something, start with your child's teacher or Family Services staff. We're happy to help you find the answer or connect you with the right person or resource.