

Heading Education and Early Childhood Development	P.S.# 1304.21	Rev. 7/2004
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HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS RATIONALE

One reason for establishing year-end and Holiday procedures at SUU Head Start is to give teaching teams guidance for use in planning. A critical aim of planning is to make sure that we relate all teaching activities to the child's world. Children are learning so many new things at ages three to five, we want to ensure that what they learn at Head Start fits into positive things they have already learned and builds on that knowledge. Child development research shows that children learn best from positive, first-hand experiences to which they can relate.

Every family approaches holidays in their own unique way. We in SUU Head Start must come up with innovative, creative ways to approach holidays that also teach and reinforce basic Head Start objectives. Please evaluate your curriculum. Which holidays have you chosen to recognize? Which have you left out? Think about why. Do your celebrations encourage:

- ▶ Acceptance of diversity?
- ▶ Respect for others?
- ▶ Personal and cultural pride?
- ▶ Self-discovery and learning?
- ▶ Good health and nutrition habits?

Do they emphasize child-initiated, child-controlled activities? Do they support strong families and cohesive communities, and the richness of the people we serve?

Are any holiday celebrations included in the curriculum because adults, including parents, believe the activities are "fun" or "cute" for children, but the activities or projects are not age appropriate for 3-5 year olds? If so, it is not appropriate for Head Start to give in to social pressures at the expense of what is good for children.

We need to ask the following questions with any activity we plan for children:

- Are our objectives age and child appropriate?
- Are we individualizing for each child?
- What does it cost and could the funds be better spent somewhere else?
- How much staff and child time is involved in preparation?
- Are we teaching objectives, even inadvertently, which conflict with Head Start Performance Standards?

The last rule of thumb is this: If any activity or celebration caused you, the children, or the families a lot of stress the last time you did it, it needs rethinking and simplifying! Please contact your Child Development Coordinator or call the Child Development Manager if you have questions.

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PROCEDURES FOR END OF SCHOOL CELEBRATIONS AND HOLIDAYS

1. Every family handles holidays differently. To be respectful of all families, SUU Head Start staff emphasize activities that encourage the acceptance of diversity, respect for others, self-concept and cultural identity.
2. If you choose to use activities that meet the other criteria of these guidelines, please limit them to the two days surrounding the holiday. All activities should be in keeping with core objectives. If you have questions about whether an activity is appropriate, please check with your Child Development Coordinator. Cut trees are not allowed in SUU Head Start classrooms. If parents want to donate a tree, children could decorate it with seeds, fruit and berries to feed the birds on the playground.
3. Whenever possible, exchange celebrations of specific holidays for **seasonal activities and festivals**. Some possibilities include:
 - a. Let children talk and write about their Halloween experiences. This gives children an opportunity to work out any fears or questions they have about their experiences and these stories (either taped or written) would be great to add to their portfolios.
 - b. A Family/Children's Winter Art Festival instead of Christmas or New Years celebrations.
 - c. Fun activities about caring and sharing during February.
 - d. Activities celebrating Spring in March and April.
 - e. A Family Celebration, to mark the end of school.
4. Consider the objectives for any celebration you do plan into the curriculum. Keep in mind that one of the best things we do at SUU Head Start is individualize for each child. As a team, be sure that activities planned are hands-on, age appropriate and as child directed as possible.
5. With any celebration or program, evaluate the cost in time and resources to decide if they could be better spent in another way for children and families. Also consider safety issues including, but not limited to, the following:
 - a. If costumes are worn for any occasion, they will not restrict the child's movements in any way. The child must be able to participate in the full range of Head Start classroom activities. Masks, gloves and costume accessories (swords, guns, wands, etc.) are not allowed.
 - b. In accordance with Head Start Performance Standards, balloons are not permitted in any Head Start activity unless they are controlled by an adult and may not be given to children for celebrations.
 - c. If activities are conducted at any body of water, the parent or guardian must accompany their child.

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- d. If children are taken to parks and other public areas for celebrations, staff must consider and **control** access to roadways and traffic and other issues that affect the safety of Head Start children and their siblings.
6. Educating families about Head Start procedures and good early childhood practices is meant to be part of the families' orientation to the program and the anti bias approach of Head Start. It will also be a part of brainstorming sessions and other parent training
7. If you choose to use activities that meet the other criteria of these guidelines, please limit them to the two days surrounding the holiday. All activities should be in keeping with core objectives. If you have questions about whether an activity is appropriate, please check with your Child Development Coordinator. Cut trees are not allowed in SUU Head Start classrooms. If parents want to donate a tree, children could decorate it with seeds, fruit and berries to feed the birds on the playground.
8. End-of-Year Celebrations are not to be treated as a graduation. Graduation gowns and caps are not allowed.
9. Use children's creations for decorating the classroom rather than commercial materials whenever possible. Family members want to see things concerning their children.
10. When planning a presentation by children for parents, keep the entire activity within the attention span of the Head Start children.
11. Do not displace your normal daily schedule with practices for Year End or holiday presentations. Keep any practice time short and simple enough to integrate into your circle times, etc. Let children show off or display things they have already learned rather than developing things specifically for graduation or holidays.
12. Please remember that parents and parent groups have input but do not make the final determination for Year-End or other celebrations that involve Head Start children.
13. When possible, encourage refreshments consistent with Head Start nutrition objectives.
14. **If Head Start Parent Committees plan evening activities including Head Start children to celebrate any special occasion, they must work with teachers and follow these procedures.**