



**Who can Participate in Child First Services?** *Below are our current guidelines for who is eligible for the program.*

- ✓ Child lives in Mecklenburg, Cabarrus, Durham, Wake, Orange, or Johnston County.
- ✓ Child is 0-5 years of age
- ✓ Child has Medicaid (special considerations with AmeriHealth)
- ✓ Caregiver(s) and/or child have an experience with various challenges including traumatic events, chronic stressors, or caregivers share developmental, social, emotional or behavioral concerns for the child at home or in childcare.
- ✓ Child is experiencing foster care or kinship care, or other involvement with Child Welfare Services
- ✓ Caregiver is able to engage in regularly scheduled (up to twice weekly during initial phase) therapy sessions with their child.
  - *At this time, we are unable to offer regular telehealth sessions.*
- ✓ Family structure can include any definition of family as long as there is legal consent to participate, and caregivers can engage in regular sessions.

### **Signs a Child may benefit from the support of Child First**

- Frequent Health Problems
- Support needed for emotional difficulties
  - Often irritable, angry, sad, overly worried, or shut down
  - Frequent tantrums (longer and more often than their peers)
- History of experience with traumatic events such as domestic violence OR exposure to chronic stressors
- Challenging behaviors at home or in childcare settings
- Difficulty connecting or responding to a caregiver
- Difficulty connecting with other children
- Engaging in behaviors that are not typically expected at their age

### **Referral Process:**

1. Utilize [Online Form](#) – please be prepared to provide the child's Medicaid information, and parent contact information for this referral. (<https://www.chsnc.org/helping-families/parent-education/#child-first>)
2. Follow up with family to review referral process, confirm interest, etc.
3. Reach out to Child First Supervisors/Team to staff case if needed. We are happy to help you with identifying families who may benefit from our services.
4. Upon referral receipt, the family can expect to hear from the Child First Team within 2-4 business days.



## Frequently Asked Questions – January 2026

Q: Are there services that cannot overlap with Child First?

A: To our knowledge there are not any services that cannot be provided at the same time from a funder standpoint, however, it is not advised to have 2 therapeutic programs or another parenting program being utilized at the same time Child First is being implemented.

Q: Does the program incorporate weekend and evening appointments?

A: We do provide a limited number of evening appointments. Due to the program being designed with 0 to 5-year-olds in mind, most sessions are done during the day and early afternoon as to not impact sleep routines and other family duties such as meal prep, school prep, and family time. If families are not available during the day, the team will accommodate their schedules and plan to meet with them either early in the morning, evening, or on the weekend (per team's discretion) to meet the family's needs.

Q: Is Child First a parenting program?

A: Child First is a national, evidenced-based, two-generation (caretaker and child) model that works with very challenged young children and families, providing intensive, mental health, home-visiting services. Although parenting support and training will be provided, this program primarily treats the underlying maladaptive behaviors and social emotional factors impacting a healthy relationship with caretakers and their children through weekly therapy sessions conducted by a trained infant and early childhood mental health clinician. This includes completing baseline clinical assessments on parent stress indexes, depression screening, anxiety screenings, attachment screenings, and other parent/child interactive screens that help inform the therapy. Additionally, the family will be receiving support and guidance from a Family Resource Partner to identify resources and referrals that will help decrease family stress and support relational health.

Q: Can you serve children in foster care placements?

A: Yes. Child First can be provided with a foster care placement if the child's social worker agrees with the service and signs consent paperwork authorizing the service. Child First is approved to provide a limited number of training hours for foster parents who require annual training hours for their home license. Please contact your licensing placement worker for more information regarding this.

Q: Can Child First be provided in reunification cases?

A: Generally, yes, but additional staffing is required to ensure we do not have a negative effect on the child during reunification efforts, as Child First is not used for custody disputes or psychological evaluations on parent capacity or parent engagement.

Q: Is Child First offered in additional counties not listed here?

A: Yes – please see <https://changent.org/locations/> for more information on other providers that provide the service.

Q: How long do services last?

A: Generally, 6-12 months in length.



Q: Do you accept commercial insurance or uninsured clients?

A: Not at this time, but we are seeking funding for uninsured clients. State dollars can be applied for this service if there is no payer and the family is at risk.

Q: Do you have a Spanish speaking team?

A: As of the end of 2025, we do not have a Spanish speaking team and are actively recruiting for a bilingual team.

Q: How long does it take to hear back after a referral is sent?

A: Our goal is to make contact with the family or referral source within 48 hours of the referral.

Q: Can a family be re-referred to Child First?

A: Yes

Q: Where can I send questions related to the program?

A: Our general email box is: [childfirst@chsnc.org](mailto:childfirst@chsnc.org)

Q: If older children are in the home, can Child First be provided?

A: Yes, most of our referrals have siblings and many are older than the child identified in the referral. Child First is designed to engage the identified child and primary caregiver in dyadic therapy and generally does not engage other children or adults during the core therapy. However, the skills and knowledge gained during these dyadic sessions can be implemented with other children.

Q: Can more than 1 child under the age of 5 in the home be treated by a Child First team?

A: Due to the intensity of the model and that most caregivers will not be able to provide that level of therapeutic support to all their children, teams try to engage only one identified child in the home. However, it can be done under certain circumstances, but always in a collaborative manner and with child and caretakers' best interests at the center of those decisions.

Q: Can we donate items and gifts to the families served by a Child First team?

A: Yes, CHS's corporate philanthropy team can be contacted at [philanthropy@chsnc.org](mailto:philanthropy@chsnc.org) to coordinate a gift or support items, such as diapers, wipes, etc.

Q: If the referral link is not working what do I do?

A: Please email [childfirst@chsnc.org](mailto:childfirst@chsnc.org) to notify us that referral link is not working and a staff member will contact you directly to staff referral.