



All Children Considered

VOL. II • 2007/08

A NEWSLETTER FOR PEOPLE WHO CARE FOR CHILDREN

SUPPORTING CHILDREN FROM TODAY'S VARIED FAMILIES

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Communications with Families Support Children

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sional development for staff members. A helpful website to test your communication skills as related to cultural competency can be found at:
<http://www11.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/ncccl/documents/ChecklistBehavioralHealth.pdf>

Good communication KEYS

- Remember, there are all kinds of families. They can be diverse in family structure, race, culture, ethnicity, religious beliefs, and economics.
- Make communications sensitive to their culture and, if possible, provide information in their native language. By communicating with sensitivity, you can avoid misunderstandings, while building their trust.
- Stress positive communication skills and active listening in your on-going profes-

Family needs differ widely

- Reach out and use your community resources. For example, as a result of working with a local fire department toy drive, a connection was made that resulted in a needy community family receiving \$100 in food gift certificates. This may not have occurred if a trusting relationship had not developed between the family and provider that lead to this information being exchanged.

(Continued on next page)

From the editor...

The last newsletter for this school year highlights how child care providers can support today's children who come from families that are diverse in terms of ethnicity, language, income, educational background, etc. These families often experience stress resulting from a variety of factors, many of which are beyond their control. This stress in turn can have a huge impact on the children in child care programs.

Our authors examine communication with families, domestic violence, divorce, foster care, and legal issues in child

protection and custody cases. We have provided information on these topics as well as practical tips to help providers in their daily work supporting children facing these difficult situations.

In addition to regular "Child Care Mailbag" and "Resource Corner" features, don't miss the article, "Faces of Connecticut's Babies." It presents the challenge and promise of keeping improvement of all children's lives uppermost in our personal and collective efforts.

Harry Mangle, Editor



- For parents who like to use technology, teachers can provide a website to communicate and share class news. If you choose to use this method, make sure you have signed permission slips with a technology policy in place that addresses sharing information such as posting pictures and student work.

Strategies for Good Family Communications and Relationships

- Parent/Teacher conferences, open door policy
- Parents reading to children, bringing in classroom supplies, enjoying a skit night, or sharing snack time
- Greeting parents at the beginning and end of the day
- Monthly newsletters, parent educa-

tion meetings, a family breakfast, tea, or picnic

Barriers to overcome

- **Language** For those languages not accommodated by bilingual staff members, ask parents if they have a friend or relative that can interpret for them. If not, contact 2-1-1 for help finding an interpreter.
- **Culture** Get to know the families and their cultures to be able to communicate well as well as understand and anticipate the effects of cultural differences.
- **Time** Plan events at different times of the day so that more parents can participate. Through notices and posters, determine how parents

would like to participate and when it is best to schedule events.

- **Past experiences** Parents who have had negative experiences with schools in the past may be reluctant to participate now. We can be supportive and encouraging to gain their confidence.

In conclusion, your style of communication will have an impact on a child's development. In today's global society, early childhood educators must consider the diversity of the children and families they serve when planning, implementing, and communicating about their program. You can learn a lot by getting to know the families enrolled in your programs. With better communication, you can better support their children.



Becoming More Responsive to Families with Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

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In order to nurture, support, and benefit children and families, their culture and their community environment need to be respected and understood. As childcare providers, we must acknowledge and recognize that everyone has the human right and authority to be equally represented and considered. We often ignore these rights when working with the disabled, children, elderly, immigrants, gays, and other culturally different individuals.

We are born with preferences and biases that reflect our family of origin and its environment. We perceive that what is familiar to us is right. When we prejudge based on what is familiar, our natural prejudices are seen and felt by others through our behavior. This behavior can turn into discrimination.

In order to engage culturally different

families, we need to be willing to listen to them with an open mind and attempt to understand the feelings behind their words. Since almost 90% of communication is through body language, it is important to pay attention to non-verbal expressions. We are obliged to be fully present with all people and to involve them in respectful communication. When we hear colloquialisms, different dialects, different languages, or street expressions, we often judge or criticize because it's not familiar to us. It would benefit us to try to understand different styles of communication by asking questions or educating ourselves through culturally appropriate materials in childcare settings, in our homes, or by working with people who are knowledgeable of various cultural expressions.

When people come into our homes and businesses, they become our consumers, our customers. It is crucial for us to serve them based on their cultural interests, preferences, likes, and dislikes. If we want to excel in our business, service, and hospitality, we need to pay attention to customer satisfaction and the community we serve.

When we value who people are, we officially and intellectually incorporate their culture into our personal and professional experience. We can do

that through education, materials, and resources as well as by adapting our care and environment to reflect cultural differences. We validate cultural differences by creating opportunities and policies to sanction acceptance.

Culturally responsive skills require the ability and motivation to ask and respond to open questions. If we, as child care and family service workers, want to develop cross-cultural skills, it is necessary to establish surroundings and conditions to facilitate cultural responsive dialogue.

We are all spiritually connected in our humanistic culture. When we are willing to explore cultural differences, we find how much we can bond around our similarities. By growing from tolerance, to acceptance, to the celebration of cultures, businesses, childcare organizations, and all community environments will thrive, improve, and become more productive.

Positive responsiveness to families with ethnic and cultural diversity will propel us on our road to cultural competence as well as personal and professional excellence.



Children of Divorce in Child Care

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The highest rates of divorce and separation in this country occur during the years when separating couples are raising young children. This can have repercussions not only for children and their families but also the other people involved in a child's life. Caregivers themselves often need resources and support, in terms of knowing how to deal with situations within their programs that arise as a result of divorce and separation.

Parents can become consumed by their own emotions and conflicts and lose sight of their children's needs; and rely more on their child's caregivers for support. Caregivers should avoid inadvertently being brought into the parental conflict, such as when one parent speaks negatively about the other parent, which in effect asks them to take sides. Caregivers have the responsibility to maintain good relationships with all the significant adults in a child's life and to ensure that everyone's priority is the child's well-being.

Here are some steps to take in order to adequately meet the particular needs of children and families experiencing divorce and separation:

1. Caregivers can identify the issues that arise that directly impact all involved: (children, their parents, and providers).
2. Administrators should produce written policies and develop forms for divorced/separated families to address these issues so that parents and program staff are clear about procedures and expectations. Some examples are:
 - Custody arrangements
 - Parent's name to contact first for general questions and in an emergency
 - A request for duplicate program information to be sent to both parents
 - Person responsible for child care payments
 - Persons authorized to transport the children
 - Visitation schedules involving pick up of the children at the program
 - Other significant adults in the children's life and their relationship to the children, especially if program staff is to have contact with them.
3. Learn about the effects of divorce/separation on children and families. Discuss "what to do if..." scenarios and situations. This training can help

prepare caregivers for, and perhaps forestall, many uncomfortable situations.

4. It is also important for caregivers to clearly communicate the following to parents (preferably in writing):

"In an effort to minimize situations which may be uncomfortable for you, your children and our staff, parents should refrain from talking about custody issues, visitation disputes, and problems with, or talking negatively about, the child's other parent in front of children."

Written policies and guidelines will help caregivers remain neutral and respond in appropriate ways to the issues that arise. Through maintaining good relations with both parents, such issues will more likely result in beneficial agreement and not repeated unpleasant scenarios.

The child's well-being should always be the priority in any situation arising from separation or divorce of the parents!

Excerpted and adapted from, *Children of Divorce in School-Age Care: A Resource for the School-Age Care Professional and Youth Care Specialist*, by Carole D. Weisberg (2000, School-Age Notes).



Legal Issues in Child Protection and Custody Cases

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One of the children for whom you are providing care might be under the protection of The Department of Children and Families (DCF) or involved in a custody case. The CT Commission on Child Protection is responsible to provide quality legal representation to poor parents and all children in Juvenile Court cases where DCF has brought a

petition claiming that a child is neglected, abused, or has special needs that the home cannot meet.

If children are involved with DCF:

- Be aware that information you obtain from DCF, the foster parent or the child's attorney is confidential.
- Confidentiality rules regarding information will depend upon the nature of your organization and the type of services you provide.
- Generally children's attorneys are permitted access to information because they are authorized to represent the child's interests in court proceedings

If the child is involved in a DCF case in Juvenile Court:

- They will have an attorney assigned to

represent them as well as a DCF social worker and may have a foster parent or another adult providing them with care.

- The child in some cases may have a separate Guardian ad Litem (GAL) responsible for representing the child's best interest to the court.

If the child is involved in a custody case:

- Learn what type of case it is and the legal status of the child's custody.
- It could be a private custody dispute between divorcing or unmarried parents in Family Court or between relatives in Probate Court and may have an attorney assigned to protect the child's interests.

(Continued on page 6)

Supporting Children During Transitions and Foster Care

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Child care providers can play tremendously significant roles for children experiencing changing homes or foster care. To promote the children's well-being, caregivers need to keep the following factors in mind:

Importance of Consistency and Routines

This may be especially true during transitions, when children need extra support, predictability, and consistency. Routines are especially helpful in giving children a sense of continuity in their lives. When their homes are changing, the stability offered in a high quality early childhood program can make a huge difference in long-term outcomes.

Many aspects of transitions in foster care can be challenging. For children, differing expectations in different homes can contribute to behavioral changes, which results in them "testing" rules and boundaries. They may also test the emotional support offered to them. If caregivers understand these dynamics, it becomes clearer why it is so important to provide both support and consistency.

Support for Healthy Attachment and Separation

When children have been placed in temporary custody, it is not uncommon for foster parents or future adoptive parents to become very attached to children, and for children to be attached to their foster parents. Attachment is at the heart of healthy emotional development, and we certainly want to enhance children's ability to trust and form healthy relationships.

Positive Communications and Non-judgmental Support

Good communication can make it more likely that positive outcomes will occur for children. However, we must realize that children and families have the right to confidentiality, and we need to support their privacy. When children are in temporary custody, their birth parents may be working hard to make reunification possible. It is helpful when caregivers are supportive of children and the adults in each child's life, without taking sides or being judgmental. Caregivers need to be aware of the many cultural and socioeconomic factors involved in these situations.

Understanding Risk Factors

Unfortunately, there is an increased prevalence of risk factors when families live in poverty, one of which is the potential for child maltreatment. Although it can be very challenging for families with a history of child maltreatment, neglect, or abuse to turn their lives around, find support, and provide healthy homes for their children, it does happen.

Prevention of Child Abuse and Maltreatment

When parents are unfamiliar with basic aspects of child development, they may not realize how important it is to know how to take care of their children. Child care providers can be very helpful in providing supports in non-judgmental ways. Teachers and other caregivers can provide guidance, listen well, and help families find other community resources. They can also be available to provide support and relief from fear during times of transition. It helps when child care providers are familiar with the protective services (Department of Children and Families) and can work as part of a team for the benefit of children.

For further information:
Heineman, T.V., & D. Ehrensaft. (2006). *Building a Home Within*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Feerick, M.M., Knutson, J.F., Trickett, P.K., & S. Glanzer. (2006). *Child Abuse and Neglect*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.



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The Faces of Connecticut's Babies

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Approximately 42,000 babies are born in Connecticut each year. Among these births, there is not a single face, but many faces.

The first face of Connecticut's babies is one of diversity – cultural, ethnic, and linguistic. We are increasingly diverse as a population. Births among our Hispanic families are growing, and now account for one in every five babies born in the state. The greatest number of births in the state is in our largest cities, where poverty and other challenges to healthy child development, learning, and safety remain

significant issues.

The second face of Connecticut's babies is one of disparity. Approximately 8% of our babies are born with a weight that is lower than the optimal weight for a newborn, and low birth weight is a strong risk factor for childhood developmental challenges. Among the roughly 3,000 babies born in the state with low birth



weight, nearly twice as many are born into African American families than white families, and over 80% of them are born in just 12 communities across

the state.

Disparities among infant deaths also exist in the state – the death rate among African American babies is three times higher than among whites and is also elevated among Hispanic babies. The economic and human cost of this disparity is significant, yet we have become complacent with these statistics. Clearly, we must address the face of disparity among our youngest children.

The last face of Connecticut's babies is the face of promise. The very earliest faces of babies are filled with promise...beginning with brain development even before they are born, ready to take in information, to feel, to learn, to respond, to grow at a speed that is almost incomprehensible to us as adults.

**Diversity...Disparity...Promise...
These are the faces of Connecticut's babies.**



Communicating with Families in Licensed Family Day Care Homes

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Communicating effectively with the parents of all children prior to and during enrollment in your family day care home is critical to meeting children's needs, as well as to the smooth operation of your program.

Each provider is responsible for developing an appropriate plan for each child's care with the child's parents

before enrollment, and updating the plan as necessary. Taking the time to develop a good plan with the child's parents helps to avoid misunderstandings.

Providers must have an understanding of and respect for all children and their families, including those who are bilingual, those whose culture may differ from their own, and children with special needs. The administration of medications and the monitoring of diabetes in family day care homes requires close communication and cooperation with the child's parents and careful attention to the regulations (sec 19a-87b-17 and sec.19a-87b-18).

Providers must maintain records on children. Parent contact information and the names of others permitted

to transport a child must be accurate and up to date [sec. 19a-87b-10(b)]. A working telephone is required with the parents' telephone numbers posted along with other emergency numbers [sec. 19a-87b-9(k)]. Family day care associations may be helpful by providing opportunities for caregivers to share effective parent communication techniques and solutions to misunderstandings or problems with each other. 2-1-1 Childcare can assist you in finding a local provider association.

Behavior management must be discussed prior to enrollment and regularly during the period a child remains enrolled in the family day care home [sec.19a-87b-10(i)].

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Parents must be provided with the following [sec. 19a-87b-10(g)]:

- Opportunities to observe the family day care home in operation prior to enrollment, as well as following enrollment;
- Immediate access to their child while the child is at the home;
- Opportunities prior to enrollment, as well as following enrollment, to discuss the child's needs and the family day care program and policies, including the type of records the provider is required to keep and the program's licensed capacity;
- Daily information about the child;
- Immediate information about any accident involving the child, or any illness or injury to the child, which occurred at, or was detected in, the family day care home;
- Information about the names of substitutes, assistants, emergency providers, and household members who have contact with the day care children;
- Information about the presence of enrolled children, or children of the provider, who are not properly immunized and any contagious illness affecting children, staff or household members at the facility that could pose a health hazard to day care children;
- Opportunities to see the provider's copy of the last interview/home visit report completed by DPH staff, upon request.

Communicating with parents and involving them in planning the programs for their children may avoid a complaint filed with the Department.



(Legal Issues continued from page 3)

Key points to remember:

- Different types of custody orders may be in place regarding the child that will influence the degree of involvement the parent is permitted to have in the child's life.
- In some cases there may be protective orders in place. Make sure you know who is responsible to make decisions about the child and who is allowed to have contact with or information concerning the child.

- A plan for handling any difficulties should be discussed with the responsible person in advance. This person may be a DCF social worker or the child's current legal custodian or guardian.
- If you still have questions, the child's attorney or GAL may be able to answer them.

If you feel that a particular child needs their attorney's assistance, or if you have any questions about the role or responsibility of attorneys provided by the Commission, you may contact us via

email at ccpa@jud.ct.gov or via phone at 860.566.1341.

For help with questions on legal issues **not related** to child protection and custody, call 2-1-1.



Child Care 2-1-1 Mailbag

Question:

Can 2-1-1 Child Care assist me with putting together a business plan if I am considering expanding my business?

Answer:

Yes, the 2-1-1 Child Care provides the following information that can assist individuals who would like to increase their capacity or are considering opening a new child care business.

Reports available to Connecticut child care professionals include "Statewide/Region Average Fees" and the "Annual Capacity/Availability/Enrollment Survey," which provide a snapshot of the availability of child care in Connecticut and the number of children served. The information is available in summary and regional reports broken down by age

group, and types of child care. This information can also be found on-line at www.211childcare.org

2-1-1 Child Care can also offer additional assistance to child care professionals about family day care associations, directors groups, and business loans. Also available is a statewide training calendar that includes training provided by 2-1-1 Child Care Early Childhood Specialists, as well as training on first aid, CPR, and administration of medication. 2-1-1 Child Care provides reports on referral history to inform child care programs how many times their information has been referred to callers.

For more information on how 2-1-1 Child Care can assist you with your childcare business, please reach us directly at 800.505.1000, Monday to Friday, from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.



Child Care Annual Report

Amparo Garcia, Lead Planning Analyst
Family Support Services, Department of Social Services

The Department of Social Services' 2006-2007 "Annual Report to the State General Assembly on The Status of Child Care in Connecticut" is now available at <http://www.dss.state.ct.us/pubs/CCAnnReport07.pdf>. Highlights include:

- 103,712 children received subsidized

child care services in Connecticut annually;

- 19,661 children and their families received monthly subsidies from Care 4 Kids;
- 8,571 preschool children participated in the School Readiness Program;
- 4,335 children, ages 1-12, participated in the State-supported Child Care Center Program;
- More than 7,000 early caregivers participated in the statewide training offered through the Training Program in Child Development;
- Connecticut Charts-A-Course scholarships benefited 679 early caregivers. Of them, 152 achieved the Child

Development Associate credential;

- The Accreditation Facilitation Project worked with 124 childcare provider sites seeking accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). As of June 2007, 7 centers had achieved accreditation in the new NAEYC-system. In addition, there were 31 NAA-accredited school-age programs, and 4 NAFCC-accredited family child day care provider homes.

Please submit any questions or comments about the report directly to amparo.garcia@ct.gov.



Little Wanderers... Ideas for working with children experiencing domestic violence

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Innocence is wonderful. It creates a realm of possibilities where dreams flourish and beautiful memories are created. However, this may not be a reality for children experiencing domestic violence. What happens to the innocence of the child who witnesses domestic violence?

While it is true that all children who experience domestic violence are affected in one way or other, not all children are equally affected. The child's response may be influenced by a range of resiliency factors present or lacking from the child's life at the time of the experience. Some children display significant signs of trauma whereas others show very little impact. The question is what makes the difference?

According to Betsy McAlister Groves, Child Witness to Violence Project in Boston, MA, these factors/character-

istics can be broken up into three categories: (1) characteristics of the child (age, gender, temperament/personality), (2) characteristics of the family (parenting, access to outside supports), and (3) characteristics of the violence (frequency, severity, and proximity).

Last year, the member programs of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Inc. provided community and crisis intervention services to 1,759 children. Many families may not be able to access domestic violence services for a variety of reasons. Often times community based providers working with children affected by domestic violence struggle with how to prioritize, secure, and stabilize services that will improve not only the lives of the children but also that of their families.

McAlister Groves suggests some basic principles of intervention when working with children who have experienced domestic violence. Providers can help children by:

- Establishing healthy relationships with trusting adults with clear boundaries and well established expectations.
- Establishing routines and using schedules, which can also help to give children a sense of security.

- Giving children permission to be children through playing, sharing, and other age appropriate activities that promote competence, self-esteem, and alternatives to violence.
- Setting up safe spaces for children to share their lives with you; many children need to tell their stories.

Often, the best way to help the child is to work with the parents. You can help support parents by providing them with resources and referrals to appropriate service agencies. Please do not try to do it alone – collaborate with your local domestic violence agency.

The membership of The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence consists of 18 domestic violence agencies located throughout the state. These programs provide counseling, support services, and safe accommodations for victims and their children. For additional information, please contact our 24-hour statewide domestic violence hotline at 888.774.2900.

In addition, providers with questions regarding child abuse or neglect should contact the Department of Children and Families Hotline at 800.842.2288.



Keeping Kids Healthy and Safe



Healthcare for Uninsured Kids and Youth



Healthcare for Uninsured Kids and Youth (HUSKY)

The HUSKY Plan offers a full health insurance package for children and teenagers up to age 19, regardless of family income.

HUSKY Plus offers additional services for children with special physical health care needs, while mental health and substance abuse treatment services are available through the Connecticut Behavioral Health Partnership.

For most families, HUSKY is low-cost or free. But even families with high incomes can get HUSKY health care for children at a group rate.

For further information about HUSKY and changes that are effective April 1, 2008, call 877.284.8759.

Neighborhood Safety Network (NSN) Safety Tool Kit Can Help Save Lives in Your Neighborhood

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recently embarked on a special project to disseminate lifesaving information to new audiences (the elderly, urban and rural low-income families, and minority groups).

By entering your organization's contact information into the NSN database, you can become a partner in the campaign to share lifesaving safety information. Of particular interest in the summer months ahead is information on child safety and drowning prevention.

For more information go to the following website: <http://www.cpsc.gov/nsn/nsn.html>



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