Beyond Physical Safety: Creating Environments Where Children Feel Safe and Secure

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The environment should convey the following:

- “This is a place I can trust.” Children can trust environments that are predictable and constant—where the furniture and materials stay in the same place and where the adults and the routines are consistent.

- “This is a place where I can explore.” Children have a natural desire to explore.

From the editor...

Keeping children physically safe is our top priority. However, in order to grow and develop, children not only need to be safe—they also need to feel safe. Creating spaces where children feel safe involves looking at the environment from the child’s point of view. Imagine a child stepping into your home or classroom for the first time. What message does your environment send to the children?

The environment should convey the following:

- N
ture of verbal and physical communication: child to child, child to staff, child to parent, staff to child, and staff to staff
- Amount of noise and confusion
- Level of anxiety
- Degree and level of emotional highs and lows
- Overall feeling that one gets when walking into your program

This scan gives an objective picture of the level of emotional safety and well-being in the program.

Look inside the newsletter for special providers’ resources, updates from the Connecticut Departments of Public Health and Social Services, information about reporting suspected child abuse, and information dealing with “bullying” behavior. Our editorial team hopes that this issue will help you, in the words of editorial team member Arlene Swatson, “… create a place where relationships grow with cooperation and caring.”

Harry Mangle, Editor
and experiment. They feel safe when they can move freely and try out new things at their own pace. When they enter the space, they should see a variety of interesting activities to choose from. They should have easy access to materials they need for these activities without the help of an adult. Activities or materials that are “off limits” should be put away.

- “This is a place where I belong.” Children feel welcome when the environment reflects what is familiar to them. As they look around, they should see dolls and children in picture books that look like them. Some of the foods served at snack times should remind them of home. Lastly, each child should have a place for their personal belongings that is their own private space.

“Take a look at your environment through the eyes of a child to ensure that it is not only physically safe but also emotionally safe. Both are essential to optimize a child’s development.”

Child Abuse and Neglect: Identification and Reporting Responsibilities

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A Visit to the Doctor

She could not figure out why her three-year-old daughter was having so many behavior problems, so she brought her to the pediatrician to ask for help. During an assessment, the pediatrician asked about the home environment. Mom disclosed that she and Dad sometimes had problems. After some questioning, Mom admitted to domestic violence. She stated that recently, during one of their arguments, Dad became angry and poured boiling oil over her body. She showed the doctor the healing wounds on her arms and upper body. As she discussed the incident, the child began acting out throughout the room and refused to listen to her mother.

Child abuse: What is it and what can we do about it?

In the case above, the child was not physically abused but was present while her mother was seriously injured. Imagine the screams of agony the child heard and how the child might have responded with terror. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) define child abuse as

1. a non-accidental injury to a child which, regardless of motive, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by the person responsible for the child’s care

2. includes:
   • any injury which is at variance with the history given
   • maltreatment such as, but not limited to, malnutrition, sexual molestation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment or cruel punishment.

DCF lists the various forms of abuse as physical abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation, emotional abuse or maltreatment, and neglect. To review the descriptions please visit the DCF website at http://www.state.ct.us/dcf/new_definitions.htm

What is a mandated reporter?

DCF defines mandated reporters as people in professions or occupations that have contact with children or whose primary focus is children. The law requires that they report suspected child abuse or neglect.

Who are these mandated reporters?

Here is a list of mandated reporters outlined by DCF: Physician, intern, registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, medical examiner, dentist, dental hygienist, psychologist, school teacher, school principal, school guidance counselor, school paraprofessional, social worker, police officer, clergy, pharmacist, physical therapist, osteopath, chiropractor, podiatrist, mental health professional, physician assistant, certified substance abuser.
counselor, marital and family therapist, sexual assault counselor, domestic violence counselors, and persons paid for caring for children in any public or private facility, day care center or family day care home.

What are mandated reporters legally obligated to do?

We must report any suspicion of abuse and/or neglect. This means that we are not responsible to have proof, to investigate, or know for sure that there is/was abuse or neglect. All we need to have is a gut feeling that something is not right; that we are concerned about what we are seeing and/or hearing. It is using our best professional and personal judgment that we are concerned for the welfare and well-being of the child.

How do we report?

If we feel we need to report a suspicion of abuse to DCF, we should contact the Hotline at 800.842.2288. We must provide them with as much information as we have, but remember we may not have all of the information that they are looking for. That is O.K. To the best of our ability, we must do our best to provide names, addresses, phone numbers, and, most importantly, describe our concern or why abuse is suspected.

When do we need to notify DCF?

The suspicion of abuse must be called in within 12 hours of reasonable knowledge of the abuse/neglect. Within 48 hours, you must submit a written report, otherwise known as a 136 form. This form can be downloaded directly from the DCF website: http://www.state.ct.us/dcf/dcf_136.pdf

For additional information or consultation:

- DCF Hotline - 800.842.2288 or website http://www.state.ct.us/dcf/hotline.htm
- A pediatrician, preferably the child’s own pediatrician
- Office of the Child Advocate - 800.994.0939
- Infoline - 211
- Aetna Foundation Children’s Center - 1. Concerns/allegations of sexual abuse - 860.714.5052 2. Safety Education program for pre-school personnel learning how to respond to child abuse - 860.714.5039

Question:

My son is 4 years old and has typically been very well behaved. Over the last month or so, he began hitting other children at his daycare and throwing things. Last week he actually got off a timeout bench and hit a parent. The center is complaining that he is out of control and informed me last week that he is on a thirty-day notice. I really like this center and would hate to move him, especially since I started bringing his sister to the same center. What can I do about this troubling behavior?

Answer:

When children exhibit sudden changes in their behaviors that seem to be out of character, it is likely that there is something new or different that is affecting him. First, consider if the cause is due to a medical reason. Second, look for any recent changes in either the home or classroom environments. You can do this by reflecting on any new changes in your family, such as the birth of a sibling or by gathering more information from those who provide care for him, such as his teachers. It is important that you speak with his teachers as often as you need to, so you can work together to solve problems and support your son as he grows through difficult times.

A service that may be helpful in facilitating solutions with your child’s behavior difficulties is the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP). Child care providers or parents can access this free service by calling Help Me Grow 800.505.7000 or ECCP 860.704.6378 and asking for an ECCP consultant in their area. This service is for child care centers that serve children birth to five.

*This Child Care Mail Bag provided by CT Early Childhood Consultation Partnership.*
Providers and Families Foster Emotional Safety

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Develop a Partnership with Families

Ongoing, good communication between child care professionals and parents is essential if we hope to make a positive difference in the lives of school-age children. In an emotionally safe environment, staff let children know they care about their families, and families know and trust that their children are in good hands.

In building relationships with families, examining our attitudes and perceptions may help us to work effectively with their parents. As children need our empathy, sensitivity, and understanding, so do their parents. Many parents feel isolated and do not have the resources they need or the know-how to access the resources available to them. We build positive relationships with parents, since an important goal is to develop a partnership with families that will benefit their children's optimal growth and development.

It takes creativity to find multiple ways in which parents can be involved, as well as ongoing effort and perseverance. Roberta Newman (1993) in Keys to Quality in School-Age Care suggests the following three steps to ensure ongoing positive communication takes place between staff and parents.

Share Information

Set up formal ways for parents to learn what's happening in your program by providing

- Parent bulletin boards
- Calendars of events
- Regular newsletters

Be sure to communicate regularly about each child's experience in the program. Remember that sharing information implies a two-way exchange of information.

Develop a Plan for Building Relationships

Communication experts tell us that the more we talk to one another, the more positive our attitude toward communicating can become. Brief positive exchanges at drop off and pick up times help build open, friendly relationships. Daily warm greetings and good-byes help children and parents feel comfortable and important.

Plan Opportunities for Parents to be Involved

- Hold family picnics, potluck dinners or other social events.
- Plan special program activities like songfests, talent shows, visits from local musicians, or other performers.
- Encourage parents to participate in field trips, if possible.
- Take photos and make videos of these events to share with parents who cannot attend.
- Invite parents to help with special projects like repairing equipment at home or helping with a Saturday cleanup and repair day.

In conclusion, the environment we create by building and maintaining positive relationships between children and families will help to create an emotionally safe atmosphere for everyone involved.
Bullying Is Not Okay!
Creating a Bully-free Environment

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What exactly is Bullying?

- Deliberate, mean behavior several times (several days, weeks, or months at a time)
- Verbal behavior (name calling, teasing, threats)
- Physical actions (hitting, pushing, kicking, tripping)
- Excluding someone from social groups or spreading stories about someone
- Typically, behavior that is unprovoked, with the bully being stronger than the victim.

Relevance of Bullying to Child Day Care Regulations

Providers are required to supervise children and create an environment that ensures the children’s health, safety, and developmental well-being; in other words, a child care setting that is free from bullying. Bullying is a behavior that is harmful to the bully and to the victim, and when allowed to occur, creates an environment that by regulatory standards is unacceptable. Even though bullying had once...
been accepted as normal childhood teasing, it is now widely recognized as one likely cause of the development of negative adult behaviors. Although the causes of bullying are hard to pin-
point, there is a wealth of research available to help determine common-
alities in the bully as well as common-
alities in the victim.

The behavior itself is easily recognized, and there are many ways that providers can work to prevent bullying from occurring in the child care pro-
gram. The Public Health Code (PHC) Regulations for Family Day Care Homes and the Regulations for Child Day Care Centers and Group Day Care Homes each provide relevant guidance for providers. These regulations provide information that providers can refer to and rely on in order to intervene when there is a spe-
cific incident that presents the potential for bullying. In addition, this information creates an environment where it is very clear that there is a zero tolerance for bullying behavior.

Planning for Anti-Bullying in Family Day Care Homes and Center/Group Day Care Homes

- Promote activities that are designed to build each child's self-esteem so that children are less likely to become victims of bullying in the future.
- Help children understand, respond to, and express feelings and emotions so that an adult always knows when something is wrong or when the child is upset. The child needs to express anger without inflicting pain.
- Teach an understanding of diversity so that children begin to realize that being different from the rest is okay and is not cause for mistreatment.
- Encourage friendships and/or develop buddy systems so that no child is singled out or left isolated and so that the child has at least one peer partner.
- Teach and encourage children to take responsibility for their own actions and behaviors so that children learn which behaviors produce good results.

Supervision

- Interact with children, even during free play so that children know that you care and that you are paying attention.
- Listen to children and observe their interactions with each other so that you are aware of potential problem behaviors.
- Supervise children and their behaviors carefully and effectively, so that you can guide unacceptable behaviors.
- Respond and intervene before an event of bullying has a chance to develop.

Appropriate Discipline

- Use appropriate discipline practices and set good examples by refraining from teasing, name-calling, threatening, or physically acting out toward children. Refrain from isolating children or telling people private information about a child. Controlling yourself in these ways will help children to trust you.
- Promote and practice zero tolerance for embarrassing and humil-
ating treatment of children, either by other children and/or by adults. This will help to make children feel safe.
- Protect children from physical and frightening treatment by anyone else in the program. This will help to ensure that children are safe.

Communicating with Parents

- Let parents know how you have incorporated anti-bullying measures and appropriate supervision and discipline measures into your program

so that they, too, might practice these techniques at home.
- Communicate with parents of the bully and of the victim if an incident of bullying does occur in your pro-
gram or even if you see the potential for an incident. This will provide parents with the opportunity to help prevent their child from becoming a victim or a bully.
- Child care providers can play an important role in making sure that no child suffers the effects, immedi-
ate or long-term, of bullying. This is one way to ensure the children's health, safety, and developmental well-being.
- The Department of Public Health, Child Day Care Licensing Staff is available to respond to your child care regulatory questions through the Help Desk at 800.439.0437 or 860.509.8045.

Source:
Mary Drecktrah, Ph.D., and Lisa Blaskowski; Bullying: The Problem and How to Deal With It
The Connecticut After School Network is a partnership of individuals and organizations working to realize the vision that “Every Connecticut child and youth will have the opportunity to participate in high quality, affordable after school programs.”

The three primary goals of the Network are to:
1) foster statewide, regional and local partnerships
2) secure resources needed to sustain new and existing after school programs
3) promote quality standards and best practices in the after school field.

The Network partners recognize that quality after school programs provide positive child and youth development while meeting their community’s needs for keeping kids safe and families productively employed. They also understand that families need a wide range of interesting and age-appropriate choices for their children when they are not in school.

If you haven’t checked it out recently, log on to the Connecticut After School Network’s website www.ctafterschoolnetwork.org to find out about training and professional development opportunities as well as the latest information about research and funding for programs for school-age kids.

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The Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, Inc. (CHDI), the statewide research and advocacy organization, recently unveiled Caring for Connecticut’s Children, Volume 2: Promoting Healthy Child Development. Volume 2 of its popular baby manual series highlights key developmental milestones of children from birth to age five and addresses how caregivers and parents can help children reach these milestones successfully.

Whereas Volume 1 of the handbook offers guidance on health and safety issues, this new glossy booklet combines the latest research from the American Academy of Pediatrics and other reputable sources on numerous child development topics, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. It also provides tips on activities that stimulate healthy child development and contact information for various regional and statewide resources. The sections are color-coded for quick referencing and convenience. In addition, CHDI is finalizing a Spanish version of its new manual. People may call 860.679.1519 to obtain a free copy of the new manual or view the booklet and complete an online order form at www.chdi.org. There is a limit of fifty handbooks per organization.

Caring for Connecticut’s Children, Volumes 1 & 2 were created by CHDI with major funding from the Children’s Fund of Connecticut, the Connecticut Department of Public Health, the Connecticut Department of Social Services, and the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. Several other state agencies and local foundations provided additional funding. The CHDI, a partnership between the University of Connecticut and Yale University, was created in 1999 to ensure that children in Connecticut who are disadvantaged have access to, and make use of, a comprehensive, effective, community-based health and mental health care system.
Attention: Child Day Care Centers Served By On-Site Water Wells

Vicky Carrier, Sanitary Engineer 3
Drinking Water Section

Website:
http://www.dph.state.ct.us/BRS/Water/DWD.htm

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH), Drinking Water Section (DWS), Operator Certification Program (OCP) is seeking to collaborate with child day care associations to make public water system operator training classes more responsive to your needs. If you have chosen to maintain your “conditional” (grandfather clause) public water system operator status, you are required to earn 10 hours of public water system operator training within the current three-year renewal cycle.

The OCP does offer a 10-hour training class at no charge. However, the OCP would like to tailor the class topics to address the specific needs of child day care center operators. If you are a member of a child day care association or group that would like to co-sponsor a training class with the OCP, please contact Vicky Carrier at 860.509.7333, or via e-mail at vicky.carrier@po.state.ct.us. You may also be able to apply a co-sponsored class toward your continuing education clock-hours requirement for your child day care center license.

Please share the newsletter with all staff.