Leaning On and Building Strengths During COVID-19 Response and Recovery: Operational Considerations for Child Care Programs

The COVID-19 situation and its impact are fluid, changing from day to day. There are many uncertainties regarding child care and child care operations. In response to the pandemic, child care professionals at both the program and system level must be nimble in their response. Child care professionals must lean on and build upon the strengths that have served them well, and will continue to serve them well during COVID-19 and beyond: **RELATIONSHIP-BASED** practices and **DATA-DRIVEN** decision making.

Relationship-Based

Child care professionals use relationship-based practices to engage families and one another in positive, goal-oriented relationships.

Data-Driven

Child care professionals use data to support goal-setting, planning and implementation to realize progress and positive outcomes for their programs, children, parents and communities.

Implement with Empathy

As you implement new policies and routines related to COVID-19, consider the feelings of everyone being impacted—children, parents, staff and yourself. Reflect on what you can do to set everyone up for success.

- Set realistic expectations.
- Clearly communicate expectations, adjusting your communications to best fit your audience (children, parents, staff, others).
- Be prepared to offer support and encouragement when things go wrong.
- Be prepared to seek support when you need it.

Seek Information from Reliable Sources

As you make decisions about your program, it is important to get and stay informed. Look to trusted sources of information.

Health Guidance

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

American Academy of Pediatrics

Business Supports and Cash Assistance Programs

Small Business Administration

Community Development Funding Institutions

Focus on Strengths

Child and family strengths: Approach program changes with the strengths of each family and child in mind. When a challenge arises, consider what child and family strengths you can tap into to help overcome the challenge.

Program strengths: As you implement new routines, reflect on what was special about your program before the pandemic. Consider how you can preserve some of those qualities.

Establish and Maintain Contact with Local Experts

The status of COVID-19 can vary from one community to another. Get up-to-date guidance from local experts and plan program operations based on their guidance.

- State and local Health Departments
- CCR&R
- Child care licensing agency
- Child Care Health Consultant (CCHC) – Ask for CCHC services from a health professional who has provided helpful information in the past about care of an enrolled child. Talking to the practice manager or clinic administrator can be helpful.

Engage Families

Work to understand the perspectives of families. Respect their role as the experts on their child and family.

Find Common Ground

- Talk with families about their goals and concerns. Share your goals and concerns with them.
- Work together in support of shared goals, e.g., help children adjust to changes and new routines in the child care environment by practicing with face coverings at home and talking with children about what might be different from what they are used to.

Share Decision-Making

When possible, partner with families to make program decisions that work for both you and families.

Optimize Business Leadership

Balance your care and education efforts with efforts to support your program's financial sustainability.

Embrace Technology

Use a Child Care Management System to automate your business functions.

- Better manage enrollment and fee collection.
- Understand how much it costs your program to provide quality care per child.
- Identify and respond to trends and challenges in your business model.

Pool Resources

Join, start or advocate for a shared services alliance.

- Streamline business operations (share administrative costs).
- Build a pathway to sustainability.

Monitor Data on Child Care Supply and Demand

- Check to see if your state's child care supply is being tracked.
- Child Care Aware® of America is partnering with several states to map child care supply over time. Check out the COVID-19 tab in our state by state resources to see if your state is being tracked.

Network with Other Professionals

Join a trustworthy networking group, association or community of practice to find professional and social support, thought partnership and resources.

Focus on What You CAN Do

You CAN:

- Teach and encourage hand hygiene.
- Conduct a daily health check of all staff, families and children including all symptoms of illness and temperature check.
- Get infection prevention education. Share with staff, families and children as appropriate.
- Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are frequently touched.
- Practice adult physical distancing from one another and use of face coverings by adults.
- Keep children and teachers together in consistent groups to minimize crossover among children and adults within the program.
- Spend time outdoors as much as possible.

You CAN continue or modify familiar activities that bring children, families and you comfort and enjoyment. Include activities that are soothing and stress-relieving and safe.

You CAN support children's success with infection prevention strategies that are harder to implement such as child use of face coverings and physical distancing among children by offering and encouraging these strategies and giving frequent positive attention to compliant children, --- up to 5 times an hour. Minimize giving attention to non-compliant children or use of punitive discipline practices.

Advocate

Now is the time to let Congress know that investing in child care is an investment in public health, and in our economic recovery. Send a message to your Senators now and let them know: **We need at least $50 billion in dedicated child care funding to support our child care system.**